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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Pak strikes kill 400 at Kabul hospital

India calls the attack a 'cowardly massacre'

ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

Pakistan overnight carried out "precision airstrikes" targeting what it described as terrorists and their support infrastructure across Afghanistan, but the Taliban government accused Islamabad of bombing a rehabilitation hospital in Kabul, killing at least 400 people.

Pakistan dismissed the number, but independent media reports said hundreds were killed. Salar could not independently verify the toll.

Deputy Spokesman of the Afghan Taliban-led government, Hamdullah Fitrat, said that Monday night's bombardment destroyed large sections of the hospital and rescue teams were trying to recover the bodies from the rubble.

Citing health officials at the hospital, TOLOnews Tuesday reported that more than 50 bodies are still believed to be trapped under the debris as rescue operations continue.

The airstrike destroyed five blocks of the rehabilitation compound, where up to 3,000 patients were receiving treatment, it said. Deputy Interior Minister Muhammad Nabi Omari, who visited the site, said that Pakistan "has undertaken a project to kill Afghans."

Residents and rescue workers inspect the site of a late-Monday airstrike at a drug rehabilitation hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan —PTI

However, Pakistan Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said on X that his country launched "precision airstrikes... targeting Afghan Taliban regime terrorism sponsoring military installations in Kabul and Nangarhar."

Pakistan had launched Operation Ghazab lil Haq on 26 February in response to alleged attacks by the Afghan forces along the 2,600 km-long border. Pakistan has also accused the Taliban government of allowing terrorists to use its soil to launch attacks against Islamabad.

India, however, "unequivocally" condemned Pakistan's airstrike describing it as a "blatant assault" on Afghanistan's sovereignty and a threat to regional peace and stability. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said India "unequivocally condemns Pakistan's barbaric airstrike" . "This is a cowardly and unconscionable act of violence that has claimed the lives of a large number of civilians in a facility which can by no means be justified as a military target," it said. The MEA said Pakistan is now trying to "dress up a massacre as a military operation". —PTI

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Iran no threat: US counter terroism officer resigns

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

The director of the National Counter terrorism Centre, Joe Kent, has resigned, saying he "cannot in good conscience" support the Trump administration's war in Iran. He claimed Iran posed no imminent threat and alleged the conflict was driven by pressure from Israel and its US lobby. Kent, a former political candidate, was confirmed last July. Meanwhile, Israel said it killed senior Iranian figures Ali Larijani and Gholam Reza Soleimani in strikes, though Iran has not confirmed. A drone attack also hit Fujairah, causing a fire without injuries, as Israel struck targets in Tehran and Beirut. —PTI

>>>More on Page 6

Suspension of 8 LS MPs revoked; Birla says no to banners

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

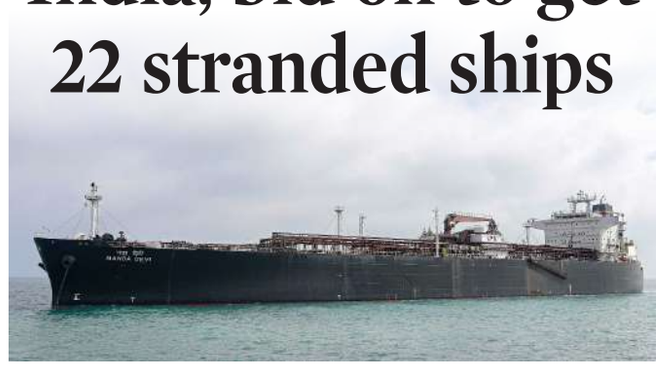
Lok Sabha on Tuesday revoked with immediate effect the suspension of eight opposition members, barred from the House on February 3 for "unruly" behaviour.

Speaker Om Birla, however, stressed that there should be no display of placards, posters, photos or AI-generated images inside the House or in the Parliament complex.

The revocation came after Congress member K Suresh requested the House to consider revoking suspension of the eight opposition members, saying whatever had happened in the House was regrettable, and that his party was ready to cooperate in the smooth functioning of the House.

Following the submissions by several opposition members, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said there was a need to draw a "Laxman Rekha" for the smooth functioning of the House. The suspended MPs were Gurjeet Singh Aujla, Hibi Eden, C Kiran Kumar Reddy, Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, Manickam Tagore, Prashant Padole and Dean Kuriakose of the Congress, and S Ventakesan of the CPI(M). —PTI

LPG tanker reaches India; bid on to get 22 stranded ships



Indian-flagged LPG carrier Nanda Devi, carrying 46,500 MT LPG arrives at Vadinar, Gujarat on Wednesday —PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A second Indian-flagged LPG tanker reached the country early on Tuesday, safely sailing from the Strait of Hormuz. Efforts are on to ensure the safe passage of the remaining 22 Indian vessels still stranded in the conflict zone.

The LPG tanker, Nanda Devi, reached Kandla in Gujarat at around 2.30 am, said Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

On Monday, the first ship, Shivalik, reached Mundra port in Gujarat.

The two ships are carrying about 92,712 tonnes of LPG - equivalent to a day's requirement of cooking gas in the country.

Sinha said all Indian seafarers in the Persian Gulf are safe.

Two LPG carriers started their journey on 13 March and crossed the Strait of Hormuz early on 14 March.

This takes the number of Indian-flagged vessels or ships to have safely navigated through the war zone to four.

Currently, 22 Indian-flagged vessels carrying 611 seafarers remain in the western Gulf, with the Directorate General of Shipping (DG Shipping) monitoring operations closely in coordination with ship owners, agencies and Indian missions, he said.

The Strait of Hormuz, that connects the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea, has been shut after the US and Israel attack on Iran.

Originally, there were 28 Indian-flagged vessels, 24 on the west of the strait and four on the east, when the war broke out. As of now, 22 vessels remain on the west and two on the east. —PTI

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14 arrested in UP for hosting Iftar on Ganga

VARANASI, 17 MARCH

Fourteen people have been arrested after a video allegedly showed them participating in an Iftar meal and eating biryani on a boat in the Ganga river, officials said on Tuesday. They have been booked on charges of defiling a place of worship and hurting religious sentiments. The action followed a written complaint filed on Monday by BJP Yuva Morcha city unit chief Rajat Jaiswal. Jaiswal alleged that the group consumed biryani mid-river and threw leftovers into the Ganga, calling the act inappropriate and offensive given the river's deep religious significance for followers of Sanatan Dharma. —PTI

RAIN BRINGS RELIEF

Bengaluru breathed easier on Tuesday as the year's first pre-monsoon 'mango showers' brought relief from sweltering temperatures that had touched 34°C. Areas such as such as Sanjay Nagar also saw hailstorms—MOHAMMED ASAD

Now, get deliveries from Postal dept within 24 to 48 hours

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Department of Posts on Tuesday rolled out three premium services, with 24-hour and 48-hour delivery guarantees for urgent and time-sensitive consignments.

The services -- 24 Speed Post, 24 Speed Post Parcel, and 48 Speed Post -- were launched by Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia.

The new offerings will feature OTP-verified deliveries and comprehensive end-to-end tracking paired with real-time SMS alerts, according to an official statement. There will be also options of 'Book Now, Pay Later (BNPL)', centralised billing, and API integration.

Initially, these services are being rolled out in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad. Dedicated processing and priority air transport will be utilised to adhere to delivery timelines. Scindia said the launch marks a moment of renewal for India Post and outlined a massive underlying opportunity. —PTI

Rly recruitment exam cancelled as Kannada activists protest

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

The South Western Railway (SWR) put off its recruitment examination after protests by the Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (KRV), who objected to the test being conducted only in English and Hindi.

The examination is part of a departmental promotion process in the Hubballi Division, covering 295 vacancies. These included 194 posts of Goods Train Manager under the 60% promotional quota and posts through the Limited Departmental Competitive Examination (LDCE) under the 15% quota.

KRV activists conducted protests at examination centres across Karnataka, including Bengaluru and Hubballi. They entered some exam venues and demanded that the examination be conducted in Kannada as well.

KRV has been opposing the exclusion of Kannada, arguing that it discriminate against Karnataka candidates.

KRV leaders said that, after similar protests in 2008, railway recruitment exams had been conducted in regional languages like Kannada. They said that the authorities had now reverted to holding the tests only in Hindi and English, ignoring earlier assurances.

Police detain members of the Karnataka Rakshana Vedike during a protest against the exclusion of Kannada in railway recruitment exams at Krantiveera Sangolli Rayanna Railway Station in Bengaluru on Tuesday —MOHAMMED ASAD

"We will not permit the examination to be conducted unless it is held in Kannada too," KRV president TA Narayana Gowda said.

An SWR official said the morning session and afternoon session of the examination was postponed due to the protests. New exam dates would be announced later, he added. —Agencies

CENTRE READY FOR DIALOGUE, SAYS WANGCHUK

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Activist Sonam Wangchuk on Tuesday termed the revocation of his detention under NSA a "win-win" development and said the Centre has extended its hand to build confidence for a meaningful dialogue with the people of Ladakh.

Asked about his next step, Wangchuk said he would travel to Ladakh and consult leaders of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KAD), which have been spearheading the agitation over the past five years for statehood and extension of the Sixth Schedule to Ladakh. —PTI

LYRICIST BLAMES FILMMAKER

Nora Fatehi, Sunjay Dutt song taken down over vulgar lyrics

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Hindi song 'Sarke Chunar' from Sanjay Dutt-starrer 'KD: The Devil' has sparked widespread outrage over its sexually explicit lyrics. The video now removed from YouTube following intense criticism.

Featuring Dutt and Nora Fatehi, the track went viral after its release two days ago. The film, originally in Kannada and set to be dubbed in four languages, will release on 30 April.

Information and Broadcasting Ministry has taken note of the controversy and may issue a notice to YouTube.

Lyricist Raqueeb Alam distanced himself, stating he merely translated the original Kannada lyrics written by director Prem. He claimed he had initially refused, warning such content would not work and might face censorship, but was asked to provide a literal translation.

Alam said he has now been asked to write a "clean" version, which the makers plan to release with an apology.

Singer Armaan Malik and filmmaker Onir were among critics, calling the song distasteful and questioning standards. "Wish I could unhear it. Sad to see commercial songwriting hit a new low," he wrote on X.

Onir questioned why the song was not banned. "And the Censor board is busy with The naming of a film #GhooskhorPandat . Strange country we are becoming... opposing Valentines Day, interfaith marriage, celebration while being ok with this rubbish," he wrote on X. —PTI

'40% Indian grads find no jobs, handful get stable salaries'

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Eleven million out of sixty-three million graduates between the ages of 20 and 29 in India are unemployed, with only a small proportion securing stable salaried jobs within a year of graduation, according to a report by Azim Premji University.

The 'State of Working India' report found that only about 7 per cent of graduates can find permanent salaried employment within a year of reporting themselves as unemployed. Graduate unemployment remains high -- nearly 40 per cent among those aged 15 to 25 and 20 per cent among the 25 to 29 age group, it said.

"The problem of graduate unemployment has been magnified in recent years owing to the growing size of the population," the report said. —PTI

Tigress electrocuted at Chamarajanagar farm

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 17 MARCH

A tigress allegedly died due to electrocution on a farm land in a village in Chamarajanagar, officials said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred at Padaguru village in Gundlupete taluk, near Bandipur Tiger Reserve, they said.

The tigress was about one-and-a-half years old, they added.

According to Forest Department officials, the incident occurred on an agricultural land owned by a farmer. An electric fence installed to protect crops by the landowner is suspected to have caused the electrocution.

The exact circumstances leading to the electrocution are being investigated.

"It is illegal to install electric fencing in agricultural lands. Only solar fencing, which delivers a shock without causing death to animals, is permitted," he said. —PTI

CM raps ministers for not replying in Assembly

Siddaramaiah says ministers embarrassed government

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has pulled up his Cabinet colleagues over the delay in furnishing replies to questions raised by legislators. Siddaramaiah warned in letter to all ministers on Monday that the lapse embarrassed the government and undermined the dignity of the House.

Siddaramaiah said that a large number of questions raised by MLAs during the 16th Karnataka Legislative Assembly remained unanswered, and directed immediate corrective action by departments and officials.

"A list of department-wise questions that have remained unanswered from the 1st Session to the 9th Session of the 16th Karnataka Legislative Assembly (2023-26) has been prepared. It has been observed that, as of the Assembly sitting held on 16 March, 2026, out of 245 questions, only 90 have been answered so far," Siddaramaiah said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah — *MOHAMMED ASAD*

- Siddaramaiah said that depts must immediately explain if there is a delay after the Speaker walked out of the Assembly when govt brought less than half the answers required

Siddaramaiah noted that the failure to respond to pending questions has hindered Legislators from effectively participating in House proceedings. "This has not only caused serious embarrassment to the government but has also undermined the rights of the Legislators and the dignity of the House".

The letter comes a day after an unprecedented development in the Assembly, where Speaker UT Khader adjourned proceedings and walked out over the inadequate replies furnished by government departments. Home Minister G Parameshwara had tabled answers for less than half the question asked. Opposition members, including Leader of Opposition R Ashoka, had accused the government of ignoring repeated warnings from the Chair.

Khader had said he would not run the House until ministers and officials provided proper explanations and later met the Chief Minister.

Siddaramaiah directed that Departmental Secretaries to immediately furnish explanations. Further, he instructed that in cases where replies are still pending, departments must write separately to the concerned MLAs, giving a definite timeline for providing the information. *—PTI*

Miffed over low attendance, Chairman briefly halts Council

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti on Tuesday briefly adjourned the House, expressing displeasure over the absence of Ministers and ruling party members post lunch break.

When the council resumed after lunch, Leader of Opposition Chalavadi Narayanaswamy pointed toward the empty Treasury benches and suggested that ruling party members seemed to have "boycotted" the proceedings.

Only Minister of School Education and Literacy Madhu Bangarappa and Chief Whip Saleem Ahmed were in attendance.

The Chairman asked, "Ministers are not here; what should I do?"

Raising objection to empty Treasury benches, Opposition Chief Whip N Ravikumar said, "If we have to speak on any issues, who should we tell? Who is there among Ministers? Where is the government?"

Following this, Horatti adjourned the House for 10 minutes.

When the House resumed, a couple of Ministers -- Ramalinga Reddy, Santosh Lad arrived, but the Treasury benches by and large remained sparse.

The Chairman asked the Ahmed: "What other work is there during the session? If there are no members and the seats are empty, how can the House run?"

Ahmed said they are "coming", but this further angered Horatti.

Congress MLC Ramesh Babu said there was some delay in the return of his party colleagues, who had gone for lunch. As a couple of Ministers and ruling party MLCs started trickling in, the Chairman called BJP MLC A H Vishwanth to speak on the Budget. *—PTI*

'Govt fulfilled promises to sugarcane farmers'

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Sugar Minister Shivanand Patil on Tuesday said the State government fulfilled its promise of providing additional financial assistance to sugarcane farmers, asserting that most farmers were satisfied this year.

Replying to BJP MLC N Ravikumar during Zero Hour in the Legislative Council, Patil said the government had already acted on several farmer-centric demands and continued to explore further support measures for both farmers and sugar factories.

"We had promised to provide Rs 50 per tonne from the government and Rs 50 per tonne from factory owners, and we have fulfilled that," Patil said.

On mill owners, Patil said that the Power Purchase Agreements

(PPAs) with sugar factories for cogeneration had not been renewed in some cases, earlier, due to the availability of cheaper wind and solar energy.

"We are considering reviewing this and possibly entering into new PPAs next year," he said, adding that open access allowed factories to sell power in other states.

He further said the government was examining demands such as exemption of water usage tax and extending support to both cooperative and private sugar mills. *—PTI*

'New laws will stop illegal sale of booze'

Excise Minister RB Timmapur on Tuesday told the Assembly that the State government will bring in new laws with stringent measures to prevent illegal sales of liquor. Pitching for stricter action against persons involved in selling Chloral hydrate powder, which is used to make illicit liquor, he said efforts are being made to bring it under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. "Because the punishments are not stringent such illegal and criminal activities are happening," Timmapur said, in response to a question by Raichur Rural Congress MLA Basanagouda Daddal during Question Hour.

Not shifting control of PUC officials to ZPs: Minister

Primary Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa asserted that there is no proposal to transfer administrative control of Pre-University education officials to Zilla Panchayats. The clarification during the Zero Hour of the Legislative Council on Tuesday comes in the wake of lecturers threatening to boycott evaluation work over this reported move to shift control.

SSLC EXAM PREP

School faculties write hall ticket numbers on the eve of SSLC examinations, at Sheshadripuram College, in Bengaluru on Tuesday *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

Minor murdered by fiancé near DJ Halli

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

A minor was murdered by her fiancé in an abandoned house in Bengaluru's DJ Halli area of the City, during the early hours of Tuesday. The 17-year-old victim, Zoya, was engaged and preparing for her upcoming marriage with the suspect, Sabeel, 25.

Sabel reportedly took her to a dilapidated house in Sakkare Mandi and slit her throat before fleeing.

Police said the incident came to light around 6.30am, after Sabeel's family members discovered her body lying in a pool of blood and alerted authorities. The case has been registered at DJ Halli police station, and efforts are underway to trace the suspect. The exact motive remains unknown.

Senior police officer Vikram Amate, DCP of the East Division, is supervising the investigation, with police actively searching for the accused. Further details are awaited. *—Agencies*

—ANI

8 held for black note currency scam in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 17 MARCH

Police in Belagavi district of the State have arrested eight persons, including two police constables from Maharashtra, for allegedly tricking people using chemicals and black paint to turn paper into genuine currency. Gokak City police on Tuesday raided a house near Hanuman temple and busted the gang, with one suspect at large. **Superintendent of Police K Ramarajan** said, "In the Gokak police station limits of Belgaum district, 'money doubling' criminals were arrested. This crime involved property cheating. Three accused from Gokak were in touch with an individual named Jayashri Babu from Maharashtra, who used forgeries to cheat people. This time, they used a 'black note' scam." He added victims were shown black paper turning into currency. *—ANI*

SC to re-examine 1978 definition of 'industry'

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A nine-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court announced it will scrutinise the legality of the 1978 judgment that broadly interpreted the term 'industry' to regulate labour relations.

On 21 February, 1978, a seven-judge bench expanded the definition of 'industry' in a case involving Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board, covering hospitals, educational institutions, clubs, and welfare departments under the Industrial Disputes (ID) Act, 1947.

The current bench, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, indicated it would not consider the 1982 legislation or the 2025 Industrial Relations Code, which have yet to be challenged in court. The CJI clarified, "We are directly examining whether the interpretation of the original provision in the Bangalore case was correct or not."

The core issue is the 1978 ruling by Justice VR Krishna Iyer, which introduced the "Triple Test" to define 'industry': systematic activity, cooperation between employer and employees, and production of goods or services. This wide interpretation included charitable organisations and educational institutions under labour laws.

Attorney General R Venkataramani questioned whether the broad definition leads to excessive litigation and unfairly classifies State functions as industries. Justice Nagarathna noted the judgment was rooted in the socialist era. The hearing continues.

The matter stems from a dispute involving employees of the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board, whose disciplinary action led to litigation that culminated in the 1978 judgment. Hearings will continue on Wednesday. *—PTI*

'NO LPG, NO FOOD'

AAP members use firewood to make tea as they protest against the Centre at Freedom Park in Bengaluru, alleging that the Union government has not handled the LPG gas issue properly, on Tuesday *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

BIPARTISAN PUSH?

K'taka MPs to meet PM over water row

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A meeting of all-party MPs from Karnataka on Tuesday decided to form a joint delegation to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi over long-pending water and irrigation projects, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said.

Shivakumar, who also holds the Water Resources portfolio, chaired the meeting in New Delhi with around 24 of Karnataka's 41 MPs.

However, BJP members, including former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai, requested that another meeting be convened after assembly elections in five states and a Union Territory on the issue as the decisions could impact poll-bound states.

"The meeting date was fixed after discussion with central ministers, before the announcement of poll dates," Shivakumar conceded.

Union Ministers Prahlad Joshi and V Somanna did not attend, citing Parliament proceedings. A whip had been issued asking them to be present in the House.

"We updated MPs on the progress made in pending irrigation projects. Some documents were shared," Shivakumar said. The delegation will meet the PM after the next meeting, to be scheduled after the State assembly polls, he added.

The key pending projects include the Mekedatu Project dispute with Tamil Nadu, the Krishna Water dispute with Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra, the Upper Bhadra Project dispute with Andhra and the Mahadayi dispute with Goa.

MPs who attended the meeting included Sudha Murty, Jagdish Shettar, Govinda Karajola, Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri, PC Mohan, Kota Srinivas Pujari, Yaduveer, Tukaram, Sagar Khandre, Shreyas Patel, Prabha Mallikarjuna, Kumar Naik and Rajasekhara Hitnal, among others. *—PTI*

Moodbidri cop sacked over sexual harrasment plaints

MANGALURU, 17 MARCH

Serious allegations of sexual harassment have been levelled against Inspector Sandesh BG of the Moodbidri police station, with multiple complaints raising concerns over misconduct and prompting a call for high-level probe.

The cop was suspended later on Tuesday.

Three women from Mangaluru submitted separate complaints in Bengaluru to the Chief Minister, Home Minister, Director General of Police, Chief Secretary, and the State Women's Commission, seeking a high-level investigation into the matter.

The complaints said that they were forced to escalate the matter to higher authorities after their earlier complaints to the Mangaluru Police Commission failed to get any response.

According to one of the women, the inspector demanded sexual favours in exchange for releasing her husband, who has been arrested in a case two years ago. He also demanded Rs 25 lakhs and threatened to open a rowdysheeter against her husband if she did not comply.

A woman also alleged that the inspector broke into her home at night and behaved inappropriately.

It is also alleged that he exhibited similar behaviour during his tenure at the Belthangady police station and harassed women visiting the station. *—Salar News*

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Army veterans seek Rahul's apology for LS misconduct

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A total of 204 retired armed forces officers, former civil servants, diplomats, and lawyers have called on Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, to apologise to the nation for his conduct within Parliament.

They described his actions on 12 March as a "violation" of decorum and the dignity of the institution.

In an open letter, the signatories stated Gandhi's behaviour during a protest inside the Parliament House complex amounted to "deliberate defiance" of the Chair, showing "disregard for parliamentary authority".

Despite an explicit instruction from the speaker prohibiting demonstrations or protests within Parliament, the Opposition, led by Gandhi, allegedly chose to ignore this directive. "Such deliberate defiance of the Chair does not merely violate procedures; it reflects a conscious disregard for parliamentary authority and a willingness to place personal political theatrics above the dignity of a constitutional institution," the joint statement said.

They called on Gandhi to apologise and to reflect on his attitude, so the "solemnity, authority and institutional sanctity of Parliament" are preserved.

The signatories accused Gandhi and other MPs of staging a protest on Parliament's steps despite clear instructions, describing such conduct as "wholly unbecoming" of the country's highest legislative body. They criticised MPs for sitting on the steps, having tea and biscuits, saying "the steps of Parliament are not a venue for spectacle or political theatre." Calling Parliament the "temple of democracy", they stressed its dignity must be upheld in all areas, including corridors and staircases. They argued Gandhi's repeated conduct undermines democratic institutions and diminishes public discourse.

Coordinated by former Jammu and Kashmir DGP SP Vaid, the letter was signed by 116 retired armed forces officers and 84 ex-bureaucrats, including four former ambassadors and four senior advocates. *—PTI*

— PTI

Ex-cricketer and Islamic scholar join TMC

KOLKATA, 17 MARCH

Former Bengal cricketer **Shib Shankar Paul**, Santal academic Tanushree Hansda and Islamic scholar Md Mufti Abdul Matin joined the Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Tuesday. Paul, a former first-class cricketer and fast bowler who represented Bengal, runs the Shib Shankar Paul Cricket Academy in Kolkata, Tufanganj and Cooch Behar, nurturing grassroots talent. Hansda, an assistant professor and head of the Bengali department at Heramba Chandra College in Kolkata, has over 15 years of teaching experience. Matin is associated with 86 madrasas spread across North and South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and Murshidabad. The state Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya said, "Shib Shankar Paul, is a former cricketer who has made Bengal proud." *—PTI*

EC deploys 1,100 observers for Assembly polls

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Election Commission (EC) has deployed 1,111 observers for the state assembly elections and assembly bypolls to be held next month. While West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry assemblies go to polls, assembly byelections in several states are also slated for April. The observers will function as the eyes and ears of the EC, and ensure the elections are held in free and fair manner, the poll panel said. The EC has directed that the observers be stationed in their respective assembly constituencies by Thursday. The observers will make public their contact details and meet candidates, political parties or their representatives, or any member of the public to hear election-related grievances. *—PTI*

SP leader booked for Azam's remarks on skipping Eid

RAMPUR, 17 MARCH

A Samajwadi Party leader has been booked for allegedly urging Muslims not to celebrate Eid this year as a mark of protest against the US-Israel attack on Iran, claiming that it was an appeal of jailed leader Azam Khan. ASP Anurag Singh said the accused, SP leader Yusuf Malik from Moradabad, met Khan in the Rampur jail on March 14. Malik later told media persons outside the jail that Khan had appealed to Muslims to wear black clothes and refrain from celebrating Eid this year over the deaths of nearly 160 girls in a missile strike on a school in Iran. A sub-inspector posted lodged a complaint against the leader. A case was registered. *—PTI*

Karur stampede: Vijay seeks CBI inquiry in Chennai

CHENNAI, 17 MARCH

TVK chief Vijay has appealed to the CBI to hold its future inquiry into the Karur stampede case in Chennai or elsewhere in Tamil Nadu in view of his Assembly election-related engagements. Prior to appearing for the CBI's questioning on March 15, the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam founder in a letter on 14 March to the CBI and Justice Ajay Rastogi, appointed by the Supreme Court to oversee the investigation, had requested permission to appear either in Chennai or any other place in Tamil Nadu in view of his commitments and preoccupation with ensuing Assembly polls.Meanwhile, Karur DMK MLA V Senthil Balaji appeared before the CBI for questioning over Karur stampede. *—PTI*

Cong fields Chennithala, Satheesan in Kerala

Cong announces candidates for 55 seats in 1st list, senior leader Sudhakaran not named

T'PURAM, NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Congress on Tuesday released its first list of candidates for the upcoming Kerala Assembly elections, announcing nominees in 55 of the 92 seats it is contesting.

The list, cleared by the party's Central Election Committee, includes 19 sitting MLAs and reflects a mix of senior leaders, organisational figures and new faces.

Key seats such as Aranmula and Chengannur have not been included in the first list. Kannur and Konni al-so remain undecided. No MPs have been fielded in the first phase.

Senior Congress leaders K Sudhakaran and Adoor Prakash were reported to be considering contests, but candidates have not been announced in Kannur and Konni constituencies linked to them.

Perumbavoor MLA Eldose Kunnappilly is the only sitting legislator left out in the first phase.

Leader of the Opposition VD Satheesan has been renominated from Paravur, while senior leader Ramesh Chennithala will contest from Haripad.

In Kannur district, KPCC Chief Sunny Joseph has been fielded from Peravoor.

Senior leader K Muraleedharan will contest from Vattiyoorkavu in Thiruvananthapuram district, while for-mer MP TN Prathapan has been nominated from Manalur.

Youth Congress state president O J Janeesh has been fielded from Kodungallur.

Malappuram DCC president VS Joy will contest from Thavanur, while Palakkad DCC president T Than-kappan has been nominated from Nenmara.

Actor Ramesh Pisharody has been fielded from Palakkad.

Several sitting MLAs have been renominated, including Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan (Kottayam), Anwar Sadath (Aluva) and Roji M John (Angamaly).

In Puthuppally, Chandy Oommen has been renominated after his bypoll victory from the constituency.

Among women candidates, Uma Thomas (Thrikkakara), Shanimol Usman (Aroor), Bindhu Krishna (Kollam) and Ramya Haridas (Chirayinkeezhu-SC) have been included.

The party has also announced candidates in several reserved constituencies in the s

New faces include KM Abhijith and K Praveen Kumar. Aryadan Shoukath was renominate— *PTI*

CPI(M) cadres booked over protest rally

Around 500 CPI(M) workers have been booked following a rally organised here against former leader G Sudhakaran, who recently quit the Marxist party amid disagreements with the leadership. Punnapra police registered the case against protesters, including Ambalappuzha area committee secretary Shyamji, for allegedly disrupting traffic during the march on 14 March. Police stated the procession unlawfully assembled, obstructed vehicular movement, and caused public inconvenience. The police have filed a case under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Sudhakaran dismissed the rally as poorly attended. *—PTI*

CPI(M) expels Govindan; defends Shyamala's candidature

KANNUR, 17 MARCH

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala on Tuesday expelled party **veteran T K Govindan**, a day after he declared his intent to contest as an independent candidate from the Marxist stronghold of Taliparamba.

Govindan had announced his decision to enter the fray as a rebel candidate in protest against the party's decision to field state secretary MV Govindan's wife, **PK Shyamala**, in the constituency.

CPI(M) Kannur district secretary KK Ragesh said Govindan was expelled from the party for indulging in "anti-party activities" and showing "political betrayal" by allegedly colluding with rivals.

He added that spouses and relatives of leaders have previously been fielded as candidates on the basis of organisational work and experience.

CPI(M) leader M V Jayarajan rubbished the allegations on Shyamala in connection with the suicide of expatriate businessman Sajan.

NDA FIELDS CHRISTIAN FATHER-SON IN KOTTAYAM.

The BJP has fielded veteran politician PC George and his son Shone George in Poonjar and Pala constituencies in Kottayam, a Christian-dominated central Kerala belt.

While seven-time MLA George is currently serving as a national council member of the BJP, Shone George is a state vice president.

He formed his party- Kerala Janapaksham (Secular) before serving in various Kerala Congress factionsHis party had been merged with the BJP-NDA ahead of the Lok Sabha election in 2024. *—PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee releases the TMC candidate list for the upcoming 2026 Assembly elections on Tuesday *—PTI*

TMC drops 74 MLAs from WB lst list

KOLKATA, 17 MARCH:

The ruling TMC dropped 74 sitting MLAs while announcing candidates for 291 of the 294 West Bengal assembly seats on Tuesday, signalling a calibrated anti-incumbency strategy.

The candidate list, unveiled by Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, sets the stage for a direct face-off in Bhabanipur where the CM will defend her seat against Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari.

Banerjee said the party would contest 291 seats while leaving the three Darjeeling Hills constituencies to ally Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha led by Anit Thapa.

Of the 224 MLAs, the party retained 135, shifted 15 to different seats, and dropped 74.

Several senior ministers -- Firhad Hakim, Arup Biswas and Chandrima Bhattacharya -- have been renominated from their existing constituencies.

Olympian and Asian Games gold medallist Swapna Barman has been fielded from Rajganj, while Soham Chakraborty has been shifted to Tehatta, and party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh will debut from Beliaghata.

Among the prominent exclusions from the list are Barasat MLA Chiranjeet Chakraborty, Behala West legislator Partha Chatterjee and Beliaghata MLA Paresh Pal.

The elections to the 294-member assembly will be held on 23 and 29 April.

Meanwhile, former BJP panchayat chief and close aide of party leader Suvendu Adhikari, rejoined the ruling TMC amid speculations that he may be pitted against the Leader of the Opposition in Nandigram seat.

Pabitra Kar, rejoined TMC in the presence party leader Abhishek Banerjee. *—PTI*

EC transfers WB, Kerala officials

KOLKATA, 17 MARCH

The Election Commission on Tuesday ordered the transfer of senior officials in West Bengal and Kerala ahead of the upcoming assembly elections.

In West Bengal, 19 senior police officers, including two ADGs, were reshuffled. IPS officer Rajesh Kumar Singh was appointed additional director general (ADG) of South Bengal, while K Jayaraman was named ADG of North Bengal, both from the 1997 batch.

New commissioners of police (CP) were appointed for Asansol-Durgapur, Howrah, Barrackpore and Chandannagar, with Pranav Kumar, Akhilesh Kumar Chaturvedi, Amit Kumar Singh and Sunil Kumar Yadav taking the posts respectively.

Superintendents of 12 districts were also changed, including Puspa (Barasat), Jaspreet Singh (Cooch Behar), Surya Pratap Yadav (Birbhum), Kumar Sunny Rai (Hooghly Rural), Ishani Paul (Diamond Harbour), Sachin (Murshidabad), Alakananda Bhowal (Basirhat), Anupam Singh (Malda), Anshuman Saha (Purba Medinipur), Surinder Singh (Jangipur), Rakesh Singh (Islampur) and Papiya Sultana (Paschim Medinipur). YS Jagannathrao was made DCP (Central), Kolkata Police.

"The Election Commission is committed to holding transparent, free of fear, violence-free and inducement-free elections," an official said.

In Kerala, Narayanan (IPS-2011) was posted as District Police Chief, Kozhikode, and Thomson Jose (IPS-2009) as deputy inspector general of police, Thrissur Range. Inbasekhar (IAS-2015) became District Collector-cum-District Election Officer, Alappuzha. Vandana S (KAS) and Sachin Krishna (KAS) were posted as Returning Officers in Thaliparamba and Dharmadam, Kannur. The EC directed immediate implementation and compliance reporting by 11am on 18 March. *—PTI*

Govt withdraws Jan Vishwas amendment bill

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Union Minister for Commerce and Industry has announced the withdrawal of The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025, from the Lok Sabha to incorporate suggestions from a Select Committee.

The Bill, initially introduced to amend laws for decriminalising offences and promoting trust-based governance, aimed to ease living and doing business, as per the Select Committee's report. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal introduced the Bill during the 2025 monsoon session of Parliament.

The Bill's statement of objects and reasons highlighted the goal of making lives and businesses easier while reducing judicial burdens.

It emphasised that resolving issues through compounding, adjudication, and administrative mechanisms, without courts, would help remedy minor contraventions committed unknowingly, saving time, energy, and resources.

Further, it aimed to foster trust in government by reducing outdated rules and regulations, aligning with the principles of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance', under the Ease of Living and Doing Business reforms.

The Bill continued regulatory reforms initiated under the 2023 Act, intending to decriminalise minor offences across sectors like agriculture and industry to create a more predictable, transparent environment. *—PTI*

BJP, Cong win 1 RS seat each in Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 17 MARCH

BJP's Sanjay Bhatia and **Karamvir Singh Boudh** of the Congress were elected to the Rajya Sabha from Haryana after the counting for the keenly-watched twin seats went past midnight.

It was a narrow win for Boudh over Independent candidate Satish Nandal, 63, as cross-voting dented the otherwise comfortable position of the Congress for securing an easy victory.

While Bhatia, 58, is a former Lok Sabha MP from Karnal, Boudh, 61, is a retired Haryana government employee and a prominent Dalit activist, currently serving as the coordinator of the National Scheduled Castes Department of the Congress.

The two legislators of the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) abstained from voting, reducing the number of valid votes to 88 in the 90-member Haryana Assembly at the beginning of polling.

Five votes were later declared invalid – four of the Congress and one of the BJP.

INLD leaders Abhay Singh Chautala and Aditya Devi Lal said the party decided to abstain keeping people's sentiments in view. Bhatia won the first seat, polling 39 first-preference votes. *—PTI*

Cong suspends 3 MLAs in Odisha

The Congress in Odisha on Tuesday suspended three MLAs for voting for BJP-backed Independent Dilip Ray in Monday's Rajya Sabha polls. The MLAs are Ramesh Chandra Jena (Sanakhemundi), Dasarathi Gomango (Mohana) and Sofia Firdous (Barabati-Cuttack). "Those who betray Congress are betraying the nation," the party said. State president Bhakta Charan Das added, "We will ensure that they are disqualified from the Assembly." *—PTI*

AFTER TVK ALLEGATIONS

Rajini denies being threatened by DMK leaders

CHENNAI, 17 MARCH

Superstar Rajinikanth on Tuesday refuted a charge made by **TVK leader Aadhav Arjuna** that he was threatened by the DMK when he attempted to make a political entry.

The top actor termed the TVK general secretary's recent remark about him, which created a controversy, as "untrue".

Rajinikanth concluded his statement posted on social media 'X' by saying, "Time does not speak but waits and answers"

Aadhav Arjuna's remark resulted in a strong backlash from the top actor's fans, AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami, Union Minister L Murugan and state Minister S Regupathy, BJP state chief Nainar Nagendran and Rajini's former advisor.

While addressing the party members during a protest against the state government, Arjuna maintained that he was not criticising the actor but wanted to point out that TVK founder Vijay had the courage to withstand such pressure.

Palaniswami said that Rajini earned respect from all sections of people, and speaking in a way that tarnished the actor's image was unacceptable.

Rajinikanth's former advisor Ra Arjunamurthy urged the TVK founder to remove Arjuna from the party.

Tamil Nadu BJP chief Nainar Nagenthran condemned Arjuna for his "unwanted remarks." *—PTI*

'I want Nayanthara': AIADMK leader takes a dig at Stalin

CHENNAI, 17 MARCH

AIADMK leader and Rajya Sabha MP C Ve Shanmugam has sparked a massive row after he made a misogynistic remark on popular actor Nayanthara while criticising the MK Stalin-led government's outreach campaign ahead of state Assembly polls.

Shanmugam, a former minister criticized the Chief Minister's 'Tell us your dream' initiative, under which volunteers will visit homes and collect public feedback and suggestions on governance.

"I want Nayanthara, will you fulfil? Will he (M K Stalin) fulfil someone's dream to marry Nayanthara?" Shanmugam said in Villupuram district, during statewide protests organised by the AIADMK against what it calls a "collapse of governance", rising crimes against women. *—Agencies*

— PTI

Drug party: BRS issues notice to Ex-MLA Rohith

HYDERABAD, 17 MARCH

The BRS has issued a show cause notice to its former MLA, Pilot Rohith Reddy, following his arrest along with two others in connection with an alleged drug bust at a farmhouse in Moinabad, on Hyderabad's outskirts. Soma Bharat Kumar, BRS General Secretary for Disciplinary Affairs, issued the notice, instructing Reddy to refrain from party activities until a final decision is made. Kumar stated, "The allegations against Rohith Reddy hurt the party's image." He emphasised the party's stance, saying the BRS opposes drug consumption. Reddy, currently in judicial remand, must submit a clear reply within seven days, as directed by BRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao. —*PTI*

12-week maternity leave for all adoptive moms: SC

Quashed rule said leave only if kid aged less than 3 months

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Observing that adoption is part of the right to reproductive autonomy, the Supreme Court struck down on Tuesday a law which said a woman would be eligible for maternity leave only if she legally adopts a child below the age of three months, holding it as discriminatory.

Ruling that age-based classification under Section 60(4) of the Code on Social Security 2020 violated Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan held that an adoptive mother should be entitled to maternity leave of 12 weeks, irrespective of the age of the adopted child.

The protection of maternity benefit cannot be confined to keeping in mind the age of the child, the court said, adding that an adoptive mother would have the same rights and obligations towards the child as the natural mother.

The SC asked the Centre to frame a law granting paternity leave considering it as a social security benefit —*AI*

The court also asked the Centre to come out with a provision recognising paternity leave as a social security benefit.

"The distinction drawn by sub-section (4) of Section 60 does not have a rational connection to the object of the 2020 Code. Maternity benefit is not associated with the process of childbirth but with the process of motherhood. The purpose of maternity protection does not vary with the manner in which the child is brought into the life of the mother.

As the roles, responsibilities, and caregiving obligations are concerned, women who adopt a child aged three months or above are similarly situated as women who adopt a child below the age of three months," the bench said.

The court's judgement came on a plea by advocate Hamsaanandini Nanduri, an adoptive mother of two children, challenging Section 60(4) of the Social Security Code that allows 12 weeks of maternity leave only if a woman adopts a child below three months of age. — *PTI*

DELHI HIGH COURT ORDER

'Don't link Hardeep's daughter to Epstein'

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Delhi High Court directed the removal of social media content linking Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri's daughter to convicted American sex offender late Jeffrey Epstein within 24 hours. Justice Mini Pushkarna also restrained users from publishing such content on social media platforms.

The judge, who was hearing a lawsuit filed by Hardeep Puri's daughter, Himayani Puri, clarified that if social media users did not remove the posts, the concerned platforms should block the content. The court also observed that Himayani Puri has a case and she will suffer irreparable damage if interim relief is not granted.

Senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani, appearing for the plaintiff, said she has a "global reputation" to protect as a finance professional and that the allegations against her were "completely false and malicious."

He said the defamatory content was published and shared by users who were "self-proclaimed journalists." also urged the court to pass an order to block the defamatory content globally.

Senior advocate Arvind Datar, appearing for Meta Platforms, submitted that content blocking was done country-wise. Restricting the takedown order to India at this stage, the court issued summons to social media platforms, asking them to file their responses.

For content uploaded outside India, the social media platforms will block access to it in India, the court clarified.

The lawyer for one of the defendants submitted that his video was an exercise of "journalistic freedom" and that it should be protected. — *PTI*

Nearly 3 lakh girls vaccinated against HPV in 14 days

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Within a fortnight of launching the HPV vaccination campaign, nearly three lakh 14-year-old girls have received the vaccine, officials said. Leading states include Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Odisha, and Mizoram. The campaign aims to prevent cervical cancer, a common women's cancer. Officials noted that the vaccine's rollout coincides with exams, but momentum is expected to increase post-examinations. The free, single-dose Gardasil-4 vaccine is administered at government facilities with parental consent and registration on the U-WIN platform. The campaign is a collective movement towards a healthier, cancer-free future for daughters, with active coordination across schools and health centres. —*PTI*

Woman killed as 'unsafe' bridge collapses in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A 60-foot iron bridge over a drain collapsed in north Delhi's Roop Nagar area on Tuesday, killing a woman, officials said.

Police said the bridge had been declared unsafe and was closed to the public with barricades. Locals informed that the woman, who seemed to be a beggar, used to often sit at one end of the bridge.

A PCR call regarding the bridge collapse was received at around 9.28am, following which police and emergency teams rushed to the spot, police said. The bridge was found to have collapsed into the drain below.

Rescue personnel recovered the body of the woman, believed to be around 50 years old, a senior police officer said. The Delhi Fire Service (DFS), the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and the Delhi Police carried out rescue operations at the site. Fire tenders were also pressed into service.

Rescue operation underway after a foot overbridge collapsed in New Delhi's Roop Nagar on Tuesday —*PTI*

Visuals showed rescue personnel sliding down the broken bridge using ropes to get to the drain to find the woman. Police said efforts are underway to ascertain her identity.

Police said the bridge belonged to the irrigation and flood department. Authorities have cordoned off the area to prevent accidents. The exact cause of the collapse is yet to be ascertained, and a detailed inspection will be carried out, officials said. — *PTI*

Odisha hospital fire toll rises to 12

BHUBANESWAR/ CUTTACK, 17 MARCH

The toll in the devastating fire at the government-run SCB Medical College and Hospital here climbed to 12 after two more patients died of burns on Tuesday.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahaling informed the assembly that 12 people died in the fire that took place at the trauma care ICU of the hospital early on Monday."As soon as the fire started, the hospital staffers shifted 23 patients from the first floor ICU and adjacent wards of the trauma care centre. They were shifted to other ICUs and wards," he said.

Seven patients of the trauma care centre died due to their critical condition while five other critically ill patients died while undergoing treatment in other wards and ICUs.

Eleven medical staffers engaged in rescuing patients were also injured. The injured staffers are undergoing treatment and they are out of danger, he said.

The Odisha government has constituted a judicial panel to probe the incident, and also constituted a fact-finding team headed by Development Commissioner DK Singh. The team will submit a report to the chief secretary. — *PTI*

Andhra releases Rs 45 crore for imams, muezzins

AMARAVATI, 17 MARCH

The Andhra Pradesh government has released Rs 45 crore to Imams and muezzins across the state as part of the honourarium provided under the NDA regime, officials confirmed. The funds were released on the orders of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu ahead of the Ramzan festival.

An official statement said, "As per Chief Minister Chandrababu's orders, Rs 45 crore has been released as honourarium to Imams and mouzans."

The honouraria for six months have now been cleared, following Naidu's participation in a Iftar on Monday night. Across Andhra Pradesh, 10,000 Imams and mouzans received the funds; 5,000 Imams received Rs 35 crore, and an equal number of mouzans received Rs 15 crore for the same period.

The move aims to support religious leaders during the festival season. — *PTI*

— PTI

No demolition without notice in Delhi, says MCD

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) told the Delhi High Court it will not demolish unauthorised sections of the homes of individuals involved in a Holi clash that resulted in a man's death, without prior notice. In petitions by Jarina and Shahnaz, the court was informed that MCD would follow due process and the Supreme Court's guidelines on demolitions. Senior counsel Sanjay Poddar clarified that actions would be limited to the residential premises in question. The court closed proceedings after the MCD's assurance, amid concerns that demolitions could be carried out without following legal procedures. —*PTI*

Gunmen shoot patient in Aligarh hospital and flees

ALIGARH, 17 MARCH

Two armed assailants allegedly walked into a hospital here and fired at a man undergoing treatment, seriously injuring him and fled away, a senior police official said on Tuesday. Aligarh Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Neeraj Kumar Jadaun said, "the victim has been identified as Vedpal, 32, a resident of a village in Khair police station area." He was rushed to Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital and remains critical. One person has been arrested, while police are searching for the two shooters. Family alleged a relationship dispute. The police identified one attacker as the girl's brother. Investigation is going on. —*PTI*

The deceased, Pawan Kumar, was handling the pistol belonging to his cousin Himanshu for the first time —*SCREENGRAB*

Property dealer shoots himself while filming reel

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A 28-year-old property dealer died after accidentally shooting himself in the chest while his cousin was filming him loading a pistol for a social media reel in Delhi's New Ashok Nagar, police said on Tuesday. The deceased, Pawan Kumar, lived in the Dallupura village, they said, adding that he was handling the licensed pistol belonging to his cousin Himanshu for the first time.

The incident came to light on 16 March after information about a medico-legal case was received at the New Ashok Nagar police station from the Dharamshila Hospital.

Police found that Pawan had been admitted there unconscious with a wound on the left side of his chest. Doctors declared him dead, police said. Police said the incident was captured on camera, even though the person filming, Himanshu, appeared unaware of Pawan's intentions.

In the video, Pawan can be seen inserting a magazine into the pistol, while Himanshu can be heard cautioning him against firing it. Moments later, Pawan places the pistol against the left side of his chest, looks towards the camera and pulls the trigger as a shocked Himashu says, "what have you done?" — *PTI*

'NO GOVT JOB VIA UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICES IN 5 YEARS IN RAJASTHAN'

JAIPUR, 17 MARCH

Around 22 lakh unemployed people are registered with employment offices across Rajasthan, according to information obtained under the RTI Act. It was also revealed that no candidate was recruited to government service through employment offices in the last five years.

The data, provided by the Directorate of Employment, shows that as of 14 January, 22,21,317 candidates were registered in district employment offices across the state. Of these, over 13.08 lakh were male, 9.12 lakh female, and 989 fell under the 'other' category. The category-wise data indicates that OBCs form the largest chunk among registered job seekers, followed by general, SCs, STs and other categories.

The data revealed limited placements in the private sector during the last five years. According to the information provided, 86 candidates were placed in 2021, 825 in 2022, three in 2023, 23 in 2024 and 71 in 2025 through employment office initiatives, including job fairs and coordination with private companies.

"The private sector has seen high growth in the last two decades. But the jobs provided by the directorate are miniscule. There is a need to activate unemployment offices and refer candidates," RTI applicant Chandra Shekhar Gaur said. The RTI application had also sought details of employment generated through investor summits held in the state in the last two years. However, the department clarified that it is not connected to it. — *PTI*

Denied leave, guard kills manager

LUCKNOW, 17 MARCH

A security guard of a Ghaziabad bank upset over leave and salary issues walked into the manager's cabin and shot him dead, police said on Tuesday.

The 34-year-old manager of the Loni branch of the Punjab and Sind Bank was rushed to a hospital on Monday where he was declared dead.

The guard, Ravindra Hooda, 50, and his accomplice, Shishupal, 57, have been arrested.

"The guard and his accomplice entered the bank manager's cabin and fired. The manager was taken to GTB Hospital in Delhi, where doctors declared him dead," police said.

SHO Loni Border Manish Bist on Tuesday said the bank manager, Abhishek Kumar, was from Patna. He was posted in Ghaziabad in August 2025 and was staying with his wife.

Police said Hooda said he had been working in the branch for the past two and a half months.

"He said his salary was reduced, and when he asked for leave, it was refused. There was an argument with him (Abhishek Kumar)," the police said.

Hooda and Shishupal were from the same village in UP's Baghpat. Police recovered a double-barrel gun and ammunition and the Arms Act has also been slapped on the accused. — *PTI*

UCC panel submits report to Gujarat CM

GANDHINAGAR, 17 MARCH

A five-member committee constituted by the Gujarat government to draft the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for the state submitted its final report to Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on Tuesday. The government is likely to table a draft bill on the UCC in the assembly during the budget session.

The committee, chaired by retired SC judge Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, made a presentation while submitting its report to the CM. The government had constituted the panel in February 2025 to explore aspects related to the implementation of the UCC in the state and prepare a draft bill for the same. The panel's chairperson said it has suggested a common framework for all religions and communities on marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption, a release stated. Equal rights for women have been given priority, it said.

Sources said the government may bring the draft bill on the UCC in the assembly on 25 March. — *PTI*

VIDEO'S VERACITY UNCONFIRMED

'Kerala Story 2' fans 'vow' to boycott Muslims

VASAI, 17 MARCH

A video, purportedly from Maharashtra's Palghar district, showing people in a cinema hall chanting slogans and pledging to boycott Muslims has triggered strong reactions.

Reacting to claims by a Congress MP that the viral video was shot in a cinema hall in Vasai on 10 March, a senior police official from the Mira-Bhayandar Vasai-Virar (MBVV) Police Commissionerate said on Tuesday that the veracity of has not been ascertained.

"We are not sure where it was shot and believe it could be mischief by some unscrupulous elements," the police official said.

The MP claimed that the video shows a group of people taking the oath to boycott Muslims after watching the film 'The Kerala Story 2'.

Syed Naseer Hussain, a Rajya Sabha member of the Congress, shared the video on X. "In Vasai, Palghar, after a free screening of the film 'The Kerala Story' on 10 March, participants reportedly took a collective oath calling for the economic and social boycott of Muslims. The encouragement of propaganda-driven narratives under the BJP government has increasingly targeted Muslims.

Congress MP Hussain said the video shows a group taking the oath to boycott Muslims after watching the film 'The Kerala Story 2' —*SCREENGRAB*

When cinema is deployed as a political instrument to stigmatise a community, it risks turning prejudice into organised discrimination emboldening anti-Muslim sentiment," he said on X.

Since its release in 2023, 'The Kerala Story,' and its sequel released, have led to intense debate. Supporters claim the films expose uncomfortable truths, while critics argue that they promote divisive narratives. — *PTI*

EID SHOPPING RUSH

People shop at a market amid festive rush ahead of Eid ul-Fitr at Zakir Nagar, in New Delhi, on Tuesday. Eid ul-Fitr falls on the first day of Shawwal, the tenth month of the Islamic calendar —*PTI*

Infiltration, eviction to drive Assam poll campaign

With the schedule for the Assam assembly elections now out, a host of issues are likely to dominate the campaign rhetoric of political parties in the run-up to the polls.

An electoral officer demonstrates the functioning of the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) during training for polling and presiding officers ahead of the Assam Legislative Assembly elections, in Tezpur —*PTI*

INFILTRATION

This has been a key issue in the state for decades, which led to the Assam agitation and the subsequent signing of the Assam Accord. The BJP-led government claims the dispensation took steps to fulfil its clauses, while the opposition is likely to highlight the alleged failure of promises to ensure constitutional, legislative, and administrative safeguards to protect and promote the cultural, social, and linguistic identity of indigenous Assamese people.

The opposition parties will also bring up the issue of infiltration by alleging that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has targeted genuine Indian citizens, who are being "harassed" under the guise of "pushing back" immigrants from Bangladesh. The Congress and its allies will raise the issue in constituencies where Muslims are in the majority.

The two major cornerstones related to the immigration issue — the updation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) — are likely to feature during the campaigning, with the ruling party claiming that the opposition to CAA was unreasonable, as only a handful of Hindus from Bangladesh have applied for citizenship.

EVICTION

The state government's policy of evicting alleged encroachers, most belonging to the Muslim community, will also be a major issue raised by both the ruling and opposition parties.

The ruling alliance will claim that it has freed forest, satra, temple and other government land that was encroached upon.

CRACKDOWN ON CHILD MARRIAGE

Measures against child marriage, leading to the arrest of many, and booking them under the POCSO Act, will also be a significant issue in the upcoming polls. The ruling alliance will claim it is a major step towards eradicating the social menace, while the opposition will try to corner the dispensation for again "targeting the Muslim community" in the state.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS/WELFARE SCHEMES

The state government will highlight the major development projects in Assam, particularly the infrastructure initiatives in roads, railways, new airports, waterways, the Tata semiconductor unit and various other agreements signed during the second edition of the 'Advantage Assam' business summit.

The Assam government's various welfare schemes for women, including distribution of Rs 1,250 monthly, benefits for women entrepreneurs and health initiatives, would be underscored by the BJP and its allies, with women constituting nearly 50 per cent of the electorate.

The Opposition contends that crimes against women have not declined, and the distribution of benefits has been partial.

The BJP-led alliance will also highlight the recruitment drive in various government departments, which has led to the appointment of over 1.6 lakh youths. It will also try to capitalise on benefits extended to members of the tea gardens, which comprises a sizeable vote bank and were traditionally supporters of the Congress, but shifted their allegiance to the BJP since 2016.

ZUBEEN GARG'S DEATH

Another issue that grabbed headlines was popular singer Zubeen Garg's death in Singapore in September, 2025, and the subsequent demand for justice for those accused of his alleged murder. The opposition parties will allege that the BJP government is not keen to ensure justice for the singer, while the ruling dispensation will highlight that it constituted an SIT, arrested the accused, and the matter is now in the court.

The 126-member Assam assembly has 64 MLAs from the BJP, while its allies AGP has nine members, UPPL seven, and the Bodo Peoples' Front (BPF) has three MLAs.

Congress has 26 members, AIUDF 15, while there is one from the CPI(M) and an Independent MLA. —*PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Puducherry bloc backs CM; Cong eyes comeback

DMK members R Vaithilingam and N Rangasamy; BJP's A Namassivayam —*PTI*

The ruling AINRC-BJP coalition government would bank on Chief Minister N Rangasamy and welfare measures to secure a successive win in this Union Territory, where elections to 30 Assembly seats will be held on 9 April.

On the other hand, the Congress-led Opposition is fancying its chances, encouraged by the 2024 Lok Sabha win.

AINRC-BJP COALITION

STRENGTHS

1. CM Rangasamy is implementing a slew of welfare measures, his clean image and the government's popularity.

WEAKNESSES

1. Allegations including corruption, failure to maintain law and order, prevalence of crimes, and "blessings" of political bigwigs for a fake drug manufacturing unit.

2. AIADMK, which had formed the government (although short-lived) in 1974 and 1977, is now in a predicament of being a junior partner and waiting for the decision on allocation of seats to it by the NDA in which it is a constituent here.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. With the BJP heading the NDA at the Centre and being a partner in the coalition ministry here, it would be a positive factor as the UT depends on the Centre for all its welfare and development-oriented programmes.

THREATS

1. Not getting statehood yet, and the removal of lone woman Minister Chandira Priyanga from the Cabinet and lack of full-fledged powers for the elected government. Continued dependence on the Centre is among the issues the AINRC-BJP alliance would have to tackle.

2. NTK, besides the fledgling LJK and actor Vijay-led TVK, may pose a surprise challenge in some constituencies.

CONGRESS-DMK BLOC

STRENGTHS

1. Congress has a widespread organisational presence, and the DMK has now significantly improved its grassroots network in Puducherry. DMK's well-oiled campaign machinery adds to the bloc's strength.

WEAKNESSES

1. Congress and DMK have not clearly decided who will head the alliance or who the Chief Ministerial candidate will be. No firm decision has been taken so far regarding seat sharing.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Anti-incumbency, fuelled to some extent by the failure to implement the 'Best Puducherry' vision, is gaining traction.

THREATS

1. Congress's dependence on a few leaders like V Narayanasamy and V Vaithilingam.

2. Infighting within DMK is a challenge.

3. Seat-sharing remains inconclusive.

2. NTK, LJK and TVK may pose a surprise challenge in some constituencies.

KEY CONTESTANTS AND STAR CONSTITUENCIES

AINRC leader and CM Rangasamy (Thattanchavadi), is an important contestant. He will likely seek election from two segments that are yet to be identified. Home Minister A Namassivayam (Mannadipet) of the BJP will have to work hard, as the general opinion is that he cannot take his constituency for granted if he seeks re-election.

PCC leader Vaithilingam MP is likely to seek election from Kamaraj Nagar.

DMK's R Siva (Villiyanoor), PWD Minister K Lakshminarayanan (Raj Bhavan) are among the key candidates. R Selvam (BJP) from Manaveli is another contestant to watch out for. —*PTI*

On the other hand, the Congress-led Opposition is fancying its chances, encouraged by the 2024 Lok Sabha win —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Activists demand withdrawal of Transgender Act amendments

Trans rights activists on Monday said they do not want any provisions from the proposed Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 to remain, urging the government to withdraw the legislation entirely.

They argued that the proposed amendments could harm the rights, dignity and identity of transgender communities.

The Bill was introduced by Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar on Friday.

Addressing a press conference here, Raghavi S, the first transgender woman to practise as a lawyer in the Supreme Court, said the community does not want minor changes in the Bill and wants it taken back entirely.

"Our demand is not for minor changes in the Bill. We want it to be taken back as it is," she said. Raghavi said many people do not understand how difficult the lives of transgender persons are and raised concerns about those who do not have access or privilege.

"For us, even changing documents takes years. Sometimes, it takes four or five years to get our identity documents corrected," she said.

After years of struggle to gain recognition and access, the proposed amendments would push transgender persons back into a system where they would have no rights, she said, warning that it could lead to lack of opportunities, restricted healthcare access, violence and trauma.

"If you read the amendment carefully, it may appear to be a well-thought-out draft. But the intention behind it is very harmful and evil," she said.

Raghavi further asserted that the amendment removes the right to self-determination, which was recognised in the NALSA judgment and rooted in constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination.

"The first thing being removed is the right to self-determination. Once this right is removed, the definition becomes very limited and only certain categories would be able to identify as transgender persons," she pointed out.

The activist also expressed concern that the amendment removes the separate definition of intersex persons and includes them within the definition of transgender persons.

"The Bill introduces medical gatekeeping. A person would have to undergo surgery, appear before a medical board and then approach the district magistrate, who may again refer them back to the board," she said, adding that such a bureaucratic structure would make it extremely difficult for transgender persons to access recognition and benefits.

Odisha Transgenders Association stage a demonstration near Odisha Assembly during Budget session, demanding withdrawal of Centre's proposed Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, in Bhubaneswa —*PTI*

Ritu, an activist, said the language of the proposed amendment suggests a form of continuous surveillance over transgender people.

She stressed that the right to determine one's gender identity is a matter of personal liberty and dignity and a constitutional right recognised by the Supreme Court.

Krishanu, another trans activist, said the amendment changes the definition of who can be recognised as a transgender person and conflates intersex persons with transgender persons. Krishanu said the proposed amendments violate the Supreme Court's 2014 judgment in NALSA vs Union of India, which protects the right to self-determination of gender identity.

The language of the amendment also creates the impression that transgender identity is something imposed through "conversion" or "undue influence", which is a deeply problematic assumption, the activist said. Krishanu also alleged that no transgender persons were consulted while drafting the Bill.

Kabir Maan, a transman activist, said he has worked with more than 15,000 children through workshops on child sexual abuse and gender education, which also helped him understand gender identities and find the strength to speak about his own.

Even after receiving a transgender ID card and certificate, he continues to face difficulties, particularly during teaching exams and interviews where his identity became a barrier.

ANISH GAWANDE SEEKS WITHDRAWAL OF BILL

NCP (SP) leader Anish Gawande on Tuesday urged the government to withdraw the Transgender Persons Amendment Bill, 2026, calling it "misguided".

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill was introduced by Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar in Lok Sabha last week. It seeks to give a precise definition of the term "transgender" and exclude "different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities" from the proposed law's ambit.

Gawande, who is the first gay National Spokesperson of a political party in the country, told PTI that the Bill "weakens a Constitution-guaranteed and judiciary-upheld right to self-determination of gender identity".

He referred to the 2014 National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgment and the 2019 Act which allowed transgender persons to identify their gender irrespective of surgery or community affiliation.

Gawande said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been "very vocal about his support for the transgender community" and has focused on "self-respect and dignity", but added that "this amendment goes against those principles of self-respect and dignity" and should be reconsidered by the government and the social Justice Ministry.

Calling the principle of "self-identification" fundamental, he said the amendment Bill "violates it for no reason".

Gawande also underlined the continuing marginalisation of transgender persons, noting that many are still forced into begging or sex work due to lack of access to housing, healthcare, education and employment. —*PTI*

—PTI

23 dead, 100 hurt in suicide bombing in Nigeria

MAIDUGURI, 17 MARCH

At least 23 people were killed and more than 100 injured in suspected suicide bombings targeting crowded locations in the north-eastern Nigerian city, police said, marking one of the deadliest recent attacks in the conflict-hit region. The explosions struck a major market, a post office hub and near the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital late Monday. Authorities said 108 people sustained injuries. No group has claimed responsibility, but suspicion has fallen on Boko Haram and its offshoot, Islamic State West Africa Province. Witnesses described near-simultaneous blasts triggering panic. Security has since been tightened across the city, though many public places remain shut amid fear. —*PTI*

Afghan man with US military ties dies in ICE custody

HOUSTON, 17 MARCH

An Afghan immigrant, Mohammad Nazeer Paktyawal, died at a Texas hospital after immigration authorities detained him, his family said. Federal officials labelled Paktyawal a "criminal," citing alleged fraud and theft, and said he had no record of military service. #AfghanEvac, a group aiding Afghan US allies, challenged these claims, criticising the government's approach. Shawn VanDiver, president of #AfghanEvac, stated, "Calling a man a criminal without a conviction... looks less like fact-finding and more like damage control." Paktyawal was arrested on Friday; during medical intake, he complained of shortness of breath. He was taken to Parkland Hospital, where he later died. The cause of death remains pending; his family described him as a healthy. —*PTI*

Ecuador deploys 75,000 soldiers to fight crime

QUITO, 17 MARCH

Ecuadorian officials announced the deployment of 75,000 soldiers and police to four provinces with high crime rates, implementing a nightly curfew from 11pm to 5am. The curfew, starting Sunday, covers Guayas, El Oro, Los Rios, and Santo Domingo de los Tsachilas, lasting for two weeks. Authorities reported 253 arrests for breaching the curfew, which excludes Quito and the Galápagos Islands. Interior Minister John Reimberg said, "Ecuadorian troops used authorised artillery to destroy three targets, with no casualties." The move aims to combat rising drug violence, with Ecuador experiencing its highest homicide rate in decades. —*PTI*

Kennedy Center to close operations for two years

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

The Kennedy Center's board voted to shut down operations for two years after July 4 celebrations. The decision follows recent resignations and cancellations amid President Donald Trump's second term, with Trump citing repairs as a reason. Trump, at the White House, said, "We're going to ensure it remains the finest performing arts facility of its kind." The board appointed Matt Floca as CEO, replacing Richard Grenell, amid criticism of Trump-aligned programming. Actor Issa Rae and musician Bela Fleck withdrew from performances, with others resigning. Trump has previously pushed for renovations. Floca, an experienced facilities management professional, joined in January 2024. The closure aims to address financial challenges and restore the venue's reputation. —*PTI*

Afghan rescuers dig rubble to find bodies

Taliban calls strikes crime against humanity; Pak says hospital was far from its strikes

KABUL, 17 MARCH

Rescue crews were still digging bodies out of the rubble of a drug rehabilitation hospital in the Afghan capital Tuesday morning, after officials there said an overnight Pakistani airstrike killed at least 400 people at the facility.

Pakistan has denied Afghanistan's accusation that it targeted a hospital, saying its strikes, which were also conducted in eastern Afghanistan on Monday, did not hit any civilian sites.

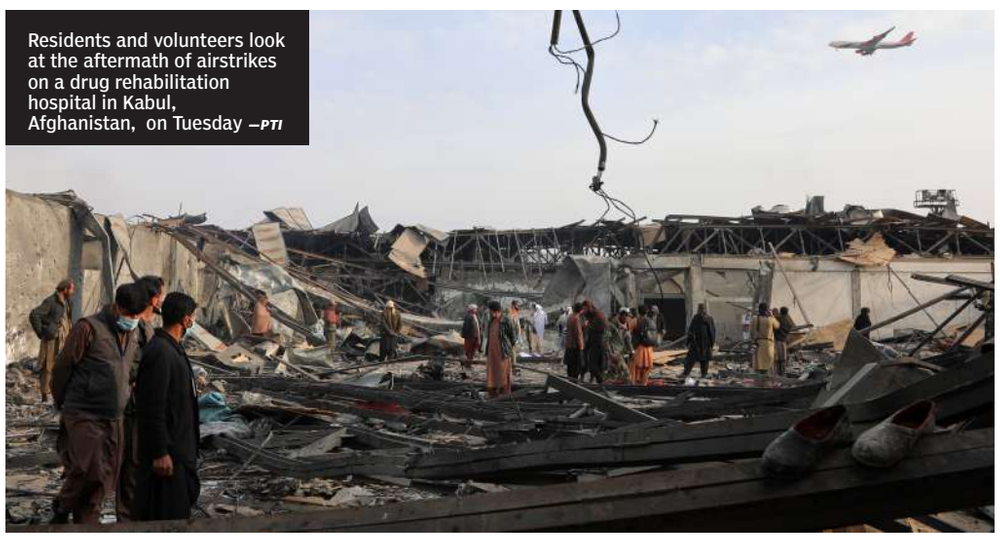
The strikes late Monday night mark a dramatic escalation of a conflict that began between Afghanistan and Pakistan late last month and has seen repeated cross-border clashes as well as airstrikes inside Afghanistan.

The strike came hours after Afghan officials said the two sides exchanged fire along their common border, killing four people in Afghanistan, as the deadliest fighting between the neighbours in years entered a third week.

Afghan government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid condemned the strike on X, accusing Pakistan of "targeting hospitals and civilian sites to perpetrate horrors." He said those killed were "innocent civilians and addicts."

"We strongly condemn this crime and consider such an act to be against all accepted principles and a crime against humanity," he said in a separate post on X.

Pakistan's Information Ministry rejected the Taliban statement that Pakistan strikes hit civilians, adding that Pakistan's targeting is "precise and carefully undertaken" to ensure no collateral damage is inflicted. A fact check posted by the ministry on X claimed that Omid Hospital, which the Afghan Taliban claimed had been hit, was "actually multiple kilometres away from Camp Phoenix, the military terrorist ammunition and equipment storage site precisely targeted last night".



Residents and volunteers look at the aftermath of airstrikes on a drug rehabilitation hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Tuesday —*PTI*

Pakistan's government accuses Afghanistan of providing safe haven to the Pakistani Taliban, which is designated as a terrorist organisation, as well as to outlawed Baloch separatist groups and other militants who target Pakistan. Kabul denies the charge.

The fighting began in late February after Afghanistan launched cross-border attacks in response to Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghanistan, disrupting a ceasefire brokered by Qatar in October after earlier fighting.

Pakistan has said it is in "open war" with Kabul. —*PTI*

Israel says it killed Larijani, head of IRGC's Basij corp

DUBAI, 17 MARCH

Israel claimed to kill two major Iranian security officials through drone strikes, but Tehran has not officially confirmed the deaths.

Israel said on Tuesday it had killed Gholamreza Soleimani, head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' (IRGC) Basij force, and Ali Larijani Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council.

Israel Defence Minister said Larijani was killed in a strike on Tehran on the instructions of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

If confirmed, Larijani's death would be the most senior Iranian official to be killed after the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who died on the first day of the war.

Larijani was seen in Tehran on Friday taking part in Quds Day rallies, which thousands of people attended.

On Monday, Larijani had called upon Muslims around the world to challenge the US and Israeli strikes.

Larijani was seen as a central figure in Iranian politics. He was also a former nuclear negotiator, and with Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, had urged Gulf states to prevent Israeli-US attacks on Iran.

The US Treasury lists Soleimani as having been born in 1965. He has been sanctioned by the US, the European Union and other nations over his role in helping suppress dissent for years through the all-volunteer Basij. His death may put strain on the Basij should an uprising against the Iranian government apparatus break out. —*Agencies*

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-18

Iran's National Security Chief Ali Larijani; head of the IRGC's Basij force Gholamreza Soleimani, —*x*

Shocked when Iran hit other countries: Trump

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

US President Donald Trump said that Washington was "shocked" when Iran retaliated to the Israeli-US strikes by attacking US bases in West Asia. However, in the lead up to initial strikes in February, Iran had repeatedly threatened to target US military bases in the region if it was attacked.

"They weren't supposed to go after all these other countries in the Middle East. Those missiles were sent to go after them. They hit Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait," Trump told reporters in the Oval office on Monday. "Nobody expected that. We were shocked. You know, they fought back."

Trump also claimed that a former president had expressed regret to him for not bombing Iran first. Trump declined to name which president this was.

Earlier, Trump said in response to a question that "Israel would never" use a nuclear weapon on Iran. Israel denies having a nuclear weapon, to little credibility.

Trump also continued to lambast European and NATO allies for not sending their ships to help open the Strait of Hormuz.

"We've been protecting these countries for years with NATO, because NATO is us. You can ask Putin. Putin fears us. He has no fear of Europe whatsoever. He fears the United States of America and the military that I built during my first term," he said. —*Agencies*

A US-Israeli airstrike had hit Tehran's iconic Azadi Stadium in early March —*TASNIM*

Drones whiz around West Asia, hitting oil, ships, and people

DUBAI, 17 MARCH

Drones and missiles continued to reign down in West Asia, burning oil, hitting ships, striking buildings and killing civilians.

FUJAIRAH HIT AGAIN

A drone attack in the United Arab Emirates sparked a fire at an oil tank farm in Fujairah, an emirate on the country's east coast with the Gulf of Oman that has been repeatedly targeted, state-run WAM news agency reported. It said no one was injured.

The UAE says its air defences responded to 10 ballistic missiles and 45 drones Iran. Saudi Arabia also said it downed three drones.

Meanwhile, two medics were injured when shrapnel fell on an ambulance centre in Kuwait.

Meanwhile, a tanker anchored off the eastern coat of the UAE was hit by debris. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre, run by the British military said the vessel was in the Gulf of Oman off Fujairah. It said the tanker sustained "minor structural damage" and no one was hurt.

DEATH IN IRAQ

At least four people were killed in Bagdad as multiple explosions have rocked Iraq's capital. Blasts were heard in the US Embassy. The Majnoon oil field in southern Iraq also came under attack, an Iraqi official said.

2 KILLED IN GAZA

Israeli airstrikes killed two Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Red Crescent said. Twelve others were wounded. The strike hit a vehicle in the Muwasi, a tent camp area west of the southern city of Khan Younis, the Red Crescent said.

ATTACKS CONTINUE ON LEBANON

As Israel threatened a wider ground invasion, the seizure of territory and the destruction of Lebanon's civilian infrastructure, attacks continued on Tuesday, but the extent of the damage was not immediately clear.

'45 MILLION MORE WILL STARVE'

"If the Middle East conflict continues through June, an additional 45 million people could be pushed into acute hunger by price rises," UN Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau warned. He noted that the conflict had already forced the UN to curb funds to Afghanistan and Sudan. —*Agencies*

DOMINO EFFECT

Lanka declares 4-day work week

Sri Lanka is introducing a four-day work week by giving Wednesday off for public institutions and schools to save fuel. Authorities picked Wednesday instead of Friday so that government offices would not be closed four days a week. Sri Lanka had earlier introduced fuel rationing mechanism to limit the amount of fuel vehicles can be per week.

Migratory birds may be hit

Nearly 500 million birds migrate through Israel and its neighbouring countries during the summer, meaning that the war on Iran could have devasting impacts. MiddleEastEye reported that Israel has shot large birds after viewing them as drones on their radars. During the Gulf War in 1992, nearly 20 per cent of the population of birds died in some areas of the Arabian Gulf.

Bibi drops another video

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released another video message amid reports that he had been killed or posting AI-generated videos as proof of life. "To the brave people of Iran, I wish you a happy holiday season (for Ramadan), beginning with the Festival of Lights. It signifies the age-old belief... that light will triumph over darkness," he said.

Climate change may make millions inactive: Lancet

LONDON, 17 MARCH

High temperatures caused by climate change could drive millions around the world into physical inactivity by 2050 and be linked to up to 7,00,000 additional premature deaths yearly and USD 3.68 billion in productivity losses, suggests a study published in The Lancet Global Health journal.

Rising temperatures could alone undermine a substantial share of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) target of cutting physical inactivity across the globe by 15 per cent by 2030, researchers from Latin America, including the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina, said.

India is projected to see a mortality rate attributable to physical inactivity of 10.62 deaths per 1,00,000 population by 2050 under the three future scenarios analysed -- low emissions, historical trends continuing unchanged and rapid fossil-fuelled development.

A study recently published in the journal Environmental Research Health suggested that in some parts of the tropics and subtropics, hot and humid conditions during the hottest hours of a year limit safe physical activity for both younger and older adults to sitting and lying down. —*PTI*

—FREEPIK

3RD IN 4 MONTHS

Amid energy crisis, Cuba faces blackout

HAVANA, 17 MARCH

Officials in Cuba reported an islandwide blackout Monday in the country of some 11 million people as its energy and economic crises deepen and its power grid continues to crumble.

The Ministry of Energy and Mines on X noted a "complete disconnection" of the country's electrical system and said it was investigating, noting there were no failures in the units that were operating when the grid collapsed.

It was the third major blackout in Cuba over the past four months.

Tomás David Velázquez Felipe, a 61-year-old resident of Havana, said the relentless outages make him think that Cubans who can should just pack up and leave the island.

Street vendors talk amongst themselves during a blackout in Havana —*PTI*

By Monday evening, state-owned media reported that power to 2 per cent of Havana's residents, representing some 18,000 customers, had been restored, as well as a handful of hospitals across the island. Officials said they would prioritise the communications sector next, all while warning that the small circuits restored so far could fail again.

The US Embassy in Cuba wrote on X on Monday that "there is no information on when power would be restored." —*PTI*

TRUMP WANTS THE 'HONOUR OF TAKING CUBA'

Trump said he believes he'll have the "honour of taking Cuba," escalating his previous claims of a "friendly takeover". "I mean, whether I free it, take it. I think I could do anything I want with it," Trump said on Monday, calling Cuba a "very weakened nation."

—FREEPIK

Sensex climbs 567 pts, Nifty ends near 23K

A total of 2,362 stocks advanced, while 1,892 declined and 157 remained unchanged

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

Benchmark Sensex climbed 567 points and Nifty closed near 23,600 in their second consecutive day of gains on Tuesday, boosted by a rally in metal and auto shares and a positive trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 567.99 points or 0.75 per cent to settle at 76,070.84. During the day, it surged 801.41 points or 1.06 per cent to 76,304.26.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 172.35 points or 0.74 per cent to end at 23,581.15.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal surged the most by 5.70 per cent. Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharat Electronics, Larsen & Toubro, Bharti Airtel and Maruti were also among the major gainers.

Infosys, Bajaj Finance, ITC, Tata Consultancy Services and HCL Tech were among the biggest laggards.

The BSE MidCap Select Index jumped 0.86 per cent and SmallCap Select Index climbed 0.67 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, metal surged 2.81 per cent, followed by auto (2.05 per cent), realty (1.79 per cent), commodities (1.69 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.54 per cent), industrials (1.54 per cent), capital goods (1.40 per cent), telecommunication (1.24 per cent) and Bankex (0.90 per cent).

IT, FMCG and BSE Focused IT were the laggards.

A total of 2,362 stocks advanced, while 1,892 declined and 157 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 2.44 per cent to USD 102.7 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 9,365.52 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth Rs 12,593.36 crore. —*PTI*

WORLD MARKETS

DOW (US): 47,235.60 (0.58%)	DAX (Germany): 23,744.75 (0.77%)
S&P 500 (US): 6,763.58 (0.64%)	FTSE 100 (UK): 10,420.38 (1.00%)
Nasdaq (US): 22,535.55 (0.72%)	CAC 40 (Paris): 8,021.05 (1.07%)
Hang Seng (China): 25,868.55 (0.13%)	KOSPI (South Korea): 5,640.48 (1.63%)
Nikkei (Japan): 53,700.39 (0.09%)	

NIFTY IT FALLS AMID NVIDIA'S NEW ANNOUNCEMENT

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

IT shares were under sale pressure with Nifty IT index tumbling over 2 per cent to touch a three-year low as new AI announcements from Nvidia sparked renewed fears that automation could disrupt traditional technology services and outsourcing business models.

Its AI chip business could generate at least $1 trillion in revenue by 2027, Nvidia said at its annual GTC developer conference in San Jose.

CEO Jensen Huang also unveiled a new CPU and an AI system developed using technology licensed from chip startup Groq in a $17 billion deal last December.

The Nifty IT index fell 2.33 per cent in early trading, emerging as the weakest performer among all sectoral indices.

Wipro fell by over 3 per cent, emerging as the top loser on the Nifty. Infosys by 2.2 per cent, while HCL Technologies by about 2.1 per cent. TCS fell by 1.8 per cent and Tech Mahindra by over 1.2 per cent.

Coforge emerged as the top loser on the BSE Midcap index as it tumbled over 5 per cent, indicating broad-based selling across IT and technology services stocks.

The steep fall in IT stocks occurred even as the broader market remained largely flat, underscoring pressure specific to the sector.

The segment is also highly influenced by currency fluctuations and global risk sentiment. —*PTI*

Rupee falls to record low of 92.40 against USD

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

The rupee declined 12 paise to settle at an all-time low of 92.40 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, pressured by rising crude oil prices and sustained outflow of foreign funds amid the West Asia crisis. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 92.35 and hit the lowest intra-day level of 92.47 against the greenback. The unit finally ended at a new lifetime low of 92.40 (provisional), registering a loss of 12 paise from the previous closing level. Despite a marginal gain of 2 paise on Monday, the local unit ended the session at a near record low of 92.28 against the dollar. Meanwhile, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 99.52. —*PTI*

Zydus, Lupin to co-sell diabetes drug in India

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Zydus Lifesciences has announced a licensing and supply agreement with Lupin to expand access to the diabetes treatment Semaglutide Injection (15mg/3 ml) with a patient-friendly reusable pen device in India. The pact aims to strengthen patient access to advanced diabetes and weight management therapies. Lupin will have semi-exclusive rights to co-market Semaglutide as Semanext and Livarise, while Zydus will market it as Semaglyn, Mashema, and Altermet. Lupin will pay upfront licensing fees and milestone payments for targets. Zydus MD Sharvil Patel said, "Our life-changing discoveries are empowering patients to live healthier, more fulfilling lives." Lupin MD Nilesh Gupta added, "This collaboration enhances our diabetes portfolio and reinforces our focus on addressing unmet patient needs."—*PTI*

Venture Catalysts exits Pee Safe with 9.6x returns

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Venture Catalysts has exited women's hygiene brand Pee Safe, delivering a 9.60x return and an XIRR of 30.53 per cent, following the company's recent USD 32 million funding round led by OrbiMed. The exit, completed in January, came through the secondary component of the funding round, providing liquidity to early investors. Venture Catalysts had first invested in Pee Safe in 2017 to support the brand's expansion from a toilet hygiene-focused offering to a broader personal hygiene and wellness portfolio. Pee Safe has since scaled its omnichannel presence to over 50,000 offline retail outlets across more than 100 cities, alongside e-commerce, quick commerce and direct-to-consumer channels. The company has recorded annual growth of about 45–50 per cent over the past two years. —*PTI*

LPG consumption slumps by 17.7% in March

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Cooking gas LPG consumption in India fell by a steep 17.7 per cent in the first half of March on the back of supply disruptions due to war in West Asia, preliminary industry data showed.

LPG consumption fell to 1.147 million tonnes (MT) during the first fortnight of March, 17.3 per cent lower than 1.387MT consumed in the same period last year and 26.3 per cent lower than 1.557 million tonne demand in the first half of February.

India imports about 60 per cent of its LPG requirements, much of it via the Strait of Hormuz, which has been effectively shut following US and Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliation.

With supplies from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates disrupted, the government has cut LPG supplies to commercial establishments like hotels and industries to safeguard household cooking gas availability.

Preliminary sales data of three state-owned fuel retailers, which control roughly 90 per cent of the market, showed LPG consumption during 1 March to 15 March was 16 per cent lower than the demand in the same period of 2024 and 10.6 per cent lower than 1-15 March, 2023.

LPG consumption has grown at a steady 3–4 per cent annually in recent years, driven by government efforts to replace firewood and other polluting fuels. Other than the two war-impacted fuels, petrol and diesel sales posted a handsome rise in demand. Petrol sales were up 13.2 per cent to almost 1.5MT while diesel consumption rose 8.2 per cent to 3.384MT. —*PTI*

Biz chamber seeks RBI aid for Iran-hit exporters

KOLKATA, 17 MARCH

The Bharat Chamber of Commerce (BCC) wrote to Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra, urging supportive banking measures for exporters reeling under disruptions amid the West Asia crisis.

In a letter on Monday, it said West Asia serves not only as a key destination for Indian exports but also as a critical transhipment hub for shipments bound for Europe and Africa.

The BCC urged RBI to encourage banks to adopt a supportive credit approach by enhancing working capital limits, providing ad-hoc credit facilities, and extending the tenure of pre-shipment and post-shipment export credit.

Greater flexibility in rollover of packing credit and extension of due dates for export bills was also sought.

It also requested extension of the moratorium on loan repayments to cover the first and second quarters of 2026 for export sectors facing logistics disruptions.

It further sought regulatory relief to protect exporters from penal interest and loss of benefits under the Interest Equalisation Scheme (IES) where payment delays arise from shipping disruptions beyond their control.

On transit period norms, the BCC requested that the permissible transit period for usance export bills be extended from "normal transit period plus 25 days" to "normal transit period plus 60 days", particularly to bring uniformity for MSME exporters.

BCC president Naresh Pachisia said exporters dealing in perishable and seasonal fashion products face acute vulnerability, as shipment delays could lead to loss of cargo value if seasonal market windows are missed. —*PTI*

STAINLESS-STEEL INDUSTRY FLAGS RISING COST

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

India's stainless-steel industry has raised concerns over increasing global energy costs driven by the West Asia crisis, impacting its operational expenses. The ongoing military tensions involving the US, Israel and Iran in the Gulf of Persia have disrupted supplies of critical industrial gases such as propane, LPG, and LNG, said Rajamani Krishnamurti, President of the Indian Stainless Steel Development Association (ISSDA).

He explained that geopolitical uncertainties influence global energy markets, freight costs, and trade flows. Since stainless steel production is energy-intensive and linked with global raw material supply chains, prolonged instability could lead to rising costs and supply uncertainties. Krishnamurti added that global energy price movements can affect production economics and freight rates.

Jindal Stainless reported that the supply crunch of industrial gases has adversely impacted operations in Haryana and Odisha amid the ongoing West Asia war. —PTI

MARUTI GETS RS 5,786 CR I-T ORDER

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Tuesday said it has received a draft assessment order worth Rs 5,786.4 crore from the income tax authority and the company will challenge the order.

"The company has received a Draft Assessment Order for FY 2022 – 23 wherein certain additions / disallowances amounting to Rs 57,864 million with respect to returned income has been proposed," the carmaker said in a BSE filing. MSI will file its objections before the dispute resolution panel, it said.

When contacted over the issue, MSI Senior Executive Officer (Corporate Affairs) Rahul Bharti said, "The draft income tax assessment order about which the company has intimated the stock exchanges is of a routine nature. Such orders arise from time to time, largely on account of interpretation issues."

The firm's shares settled at Rs 12,993.55 apiece, up 1.88 per cent on BSE. —*PTI*

Silver jumps to ₹2.6L/kg, gold rebounds to ₹1.61L/10g

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Precious metal prices rebounded by up to 2 per cent, with silver gaining by Rs 6,000 to Rs 2.62 lakh per kilogram, and gold rose to Rs 1.61 lakh per 10g in the national capital on Tuesday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The white metal increased by Rs 6,000, or 2.34 per cent, to Rs 2,62,500 per kg (inclusive of all taxes).

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity in the bullion market also snapped its three-day losing streak, rising by Rs 1,050, or nearly 1 per cent, to Rs 1,61,300 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes).

Analysts said the rebound in bullion prices was supported by safe-haven demand amid geopolitical tensions, even as global cues remained subdued.

In the international market, spot gold was trading marginally lower at USD 5,003.68 per ounce, and silver also went lower by 0.35 per cent, to USD 80.46 per ounce. —*PTI*

'India's chemicals industry to reach $255B by 2030'

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

India's chemicals industry is projected to surpass its current valuation of $155-165 billion and reach $230-255 billion by 2030, according to a McKinsey report.

Despite global headwinds, the sector is expected to grow at an 8-9 per cent CAGR, driven by eight high-growth segments, including semiconductors, electric vehicles, renewables, aerospace, auto components, bio-to-X, and e-commerce. These segments could generate an additional $30-35 billion in demand by 2030, with construction chemicals expected to double to $28 billion due to infrastructure growth. The industry has delivered a 17 per cent CAGR over the past decade but faces a $31 billion trade deficit, mainly in inorganics and polymers. To capitalise on growth, firms need to expand globally, increase R&D, pursue partnerships, and adopt AI efficiencies.

It states that India's trade deficit offers significant import substitution opportunities. Despite strong export growth, India's share of global trade remains low at 3 per cent, compared to China's over 20 per cent. —*PTI*

IN FOUR DECADES

India expands education, jobs challenge remains: Report

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

- The report draws on official databases going back four decades to see how youth participation in education and employment has changed, how well this demographic dividend has been used and the challenges and opportunities that arise in integrating them into the workforce.

India has made substantial progress in expanding access to higher education for youth in the last four decades, helping them move from agriculture to industry and services, and reduced gender and caste-based disparities, a report said.

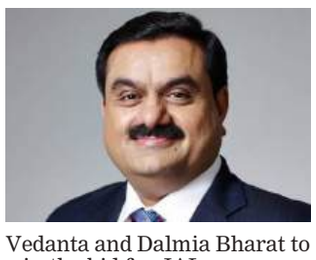
However, the 'State of Working India 2026' report stated that the challenges remain and the extent to which the large, increasingly educated, and aspirational cohort is absorbed into the labour market will determine whether India's demographic dividend translates into an economic dividend.

India has made substantial progress in expanding access to higher education for its young (15 to 29-year-old) population, ensuring a movement out of agriculture into industry and services, and reduced gender and caste-based disparities, it stated. "More young people today are educated, informed, and ambitious than ever before. These are real achievements of which we can be proud," noted Indu Prasad, President, Azim Premji University in a statement.

The report draws on official databases going back four decades to see how youth participation in education and employment has changed, how well this demographic dividend has been used and the challenges and opportunities that arise in integrating them into the workforce. The key findings of the report highlights that demographic dividend is nearing peak. India's working-age population share will begin declining after 2030. The pace of job creation in the coming decades is critical to ensure that the demographic dividend translates into an economic one, it stated.Youth education levels have increased significantly over the four decades, especially among women. —*PTI*

Adani Group to buy bankrupt Jaiprakash for ₹14,535 crore

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH



The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Tuesday approved Adani Enterprises Ltd's Rs 14,535 crore bid to acquire Jaiprakash Associates Ltd through the insolvency process.

In a regulatory filing, Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) informed that the NCLT, Allahabad bench, has "orally pronounced an order on 17 March, 2026 "approving the resolution plan submitted by Adani Enterprises Ltd.

In November last year, a Committee of Creditors (CoC) approved the resolution plan by business tycoon Gautam Adani to acquire JAL.

Adani Enterprises won the approval of creditors of JAL for its Rs 14,535 crore acquisition proposal for the bankrupt infrastructure group. It outbid Vedanta and Dalmia Bharat to win the bid for JAL.

The COC of JAL, a company undergoing Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 (IBC), has approved the resolution plan submitted by Adani Enterprises Limited (AEL)," AEL had said in a stock exchange filing.

Adani got the maximum 89 per cent votes from creditors, followed by Dalmia Cement (Bharat) and Vedanta Group, it added. —*PTI*

World No. 3 Fleetwood to defend DP World

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

World No.3 Tommy Fleetwood will defend his title at the DP World India Championship at Delhi Golf Club from October 15-18. He won the inaugural event last season for his eighth DP World Tour title and returns for the USD 4 million tournament. Fleetwood said India's atmosphere, food and the challenging course made the win special, alongside celebrating with family. The victory capped a superb run, including the FedExCup and a Ryder Cup triumph with Europe in the US. The event forms part of the Race to Dubai's Back 9 phase, leading to November's season-ending finale. —PTI

Madrid, PSG protect 3-goal leads in UEFA

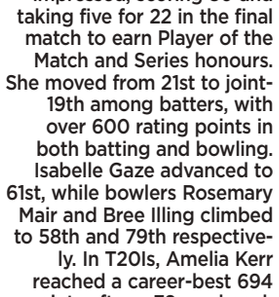
WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

UEFA Champions League heavyweights Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain head into Tuesday's round-of-16 second legs with commanding leads, aiming to seal quarterfinal spots. Madrid leads Manchester City 3-0, while PSG hold a 5-2 advantage over Chelsea. English clubs endured a poor first-leg showing, with none of their six representatives securing a win. Arsenal remains best placed, level 1-1 with Bayer Leverkusen ahead of their London clash. Meanwhile, Norwegian debutants Bodø/Glimt lead Sporting Lisbon 3-0, eyeing another upset after eliminating Inter Milan and beating Atletico Madrid. —PTI

'Squash players will dream wining at L A Olympics'

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

India's top-ranked squash player Anahat Singh says the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics will be the sport's central focus following its Olympic debut. Speaking ahead of the JSW Indian Open, she called an Olympic medal every athlete's dream and a long-term goal. The PSA Copper event offers ranking points and builds momentum towards the Asian Games. India's No.2 Ramit Tandon said Olympic inclusion has boosted corporate backing and tournaments. He noted scheduling uncertainties due to Middle East tensions, with events like the World Championships in Cairo under review. Both players are targeting peak form for the Asian Games, a key Olympic quaifier. —PTI



—ANI

Harmanpreet rises to 7th as Mandhana stays No.1 in ODI

DUBAI, 17 MARCH

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur has climbed to seventh in the latest ICC women's ODI batting rankings, while vice-captain Smriti Mandhana retained the top spot.Kaur moved up one place after New Zealand's Sophie Devine slipped two positions to ninth. Jemimah Rodrigues remained unchanged at 12th. New Zealand's Maddy Green made significant gains following her 94 in the final ODI against Zimbabwe, helping secure a 3-0 series sweep. The 33-year-old rose five places to 17th with a career-best 610 rating points. All-rounder Amelia Kerr also impressed, scoring 80 and taking five for 22 in the final match to earn Player of the Match and Series honours. She moved from 21st to joint-19th among batters, with over 600 rating points in both batting and bowling. Isabelle Gaze advanced to 61st, while bowlers Rosemary Mair and Bree Illing climbed to 58th and 79th respectively. In T20Is, Amelia Kerr reached a career-best 694 points after a 78-run knock against South Africa. Georgia Plimmer rose to 41st, while Jess Kerr and Sophie Devine made notable gains in bowling rankings. —PTI

Said sorry to Daryl Mitchel for Arshdeep throwing: SKY

Says his team lacks experience, but has passion

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

India T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav has revealed he personally apologised to New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell after a throw from Arshdeep Singh struck him during the recent T20 World Cup final, stressing the importance of setting the right example as captain.

Arshdeep was fined 15 per cent of his match fee and handed a demerit point by the ICC after his throw hit Mitchell on the pads. The incident briefly escalated when the pacer did not immediately apologise, prompting Mitchell to confront him before Suryakumar and the on-field umpires intervened.

India went on to win the final by 96 runs to retain the title, and Arshdeep later issued a public apology, with both players shaking hands after the match.

Speaking in a podcast with PTI Videos, Suryakumar downplayed the flashpoint as a "heat of the moment" occurrence but emphasised accountability. He said he told Arshdeep such actions were not acceptable and also approached Mitchell himself.

ICC Men's T20 World Cup-winning India captain Suryakumar Yadav speaks during an interview with PTI, in New Delhi —PTI

Arshdeep, in a post-match interview, clarified that his throw had "reverse-swung" and was not deliberate.

Reflecting on India's back-to-back T20 World Cup triumphs, Suryakumar contrasted the 2024 and 2026 squads, describing the former as driven by "experienced enthusiasm" and the latter by the "fiery passion of youth".

The 2024 side, led by Rohit Sharma and featuring stalwarts Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja, combined experience with clearly defined roles to end India's ICC title drought. All three retired from T20 internationals after that triumph, paving the way for a younger core under Suryakumar.He said the current team lacked experience, it compensated with energy, with most players aged between 25 and 27. Managing expectations at home was key, especially with large crowds creating an intense atmosphere.

> **In school or college, I could never cross 50-60 per cent. But definitely, it feels good to hear I have 80 per cent winning rate in cricket. Although, I don't pay much attention to stats. But nobody likes to lose in any game. I also love winning all the games**
>
> -Suryakumar Yadav

Suryakumar said emotions in 2026 were heightened by the desire to win in India. —PTI

ON MEDICAL GROUNDS

Harshit set to miss most of IPL due to knee injury

KOLKATA, 17 MARCH

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) pacer Harshit Rana is likely to miss a significant part of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) as he continues his recovery from knee surgery last month.

According to a report by ESPNcricinfo, the BCCI medical team has not set a clear timeline for his return. Rana is currently undergoing rehabilitation after suffering a ligament strain in his right knee during India's T20 World Cup warm-up match against South Africa.

The injury forced him to pull up after just one over, and he was subsequently ruled out of the World Cup following surgery. Mohammed Siraj replaced him in the squad and featured in one match during India's title-winning campaign.

Rana was, however, recognised for his performances earlier this year, receiving the Best International Debutant honour at the BCCI Naman Awards on Sunday.

His absence is a blow to three-time IPL champions KKR, who are already dealing

with multiple fitness setbacks. Sri Lanka's Matheesha Pathirana is recovering from a calf strain sustained during the World Cup, casting doubt over his availability.

Adding to their woes, Bangladesh left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman is unavailable after the BCCI directed the franchise to release him amid strained geopolitical relations earlier this year.

KKR have signed Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani as a replacement. He is set to join the squad on Tuesday after opting out of his Pakistan Super League stint with Islamabad United.

KKR will begin pre-season training on Wednesday and open their campaign against Mumbai Indians on 29 March. —PTI

Meenakshi in Asian Championships team

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Overcoming self-doubts, Meenakshi Goyat stunned Antim Panghal to secure her place in India's team for next month's Asian Championships, handing the two-time World medallist a rare defeat at home.

Having lost to Antim three times in trials before, Meenakshi displayed solid defence, winning by fall after leading 6-2 against the Asian Games bronze medallist, who has dominated the 53kg category since Vinesh Phogat's departure. She kept Antim in a headlock, preventing her aggressive style.

Antim attempted a double-leg early, but Meenakshi denied her and pushed for a pin. She executed a takedown, earning a point after Antim retaliated. With a push-out, the score was tied 2-2.

In the second period, Meenakshi scored consecutive takedowns to lead 6-2 and pinned Antim in the final seconds.

Meenakshi, a two-time national champion from Sonepat, said, "It's really fun winning the trials," and "I overcame doubts about my capabilities."

The Asian Championships will be held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from 6 to 11 April. —PTI

Iran refuses to play FIFA in US

TEHRAN, 17 MARCH

Iran is in talks with FIFA to relocate its 2026 World Cup group matches from the United States to Mexico, citing security concerns and heightened political tensions, according to Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) President Mehdi Taj.

The United States is set to co-host the tournament alongside Canada and Mexico, with the expanded 48-team event running from 11 June to 19 July. Matches will begin at Mexico City Stadium and conclude at New York New Jersey Stadium.

In a post on X, Taj claimed US President Donald Trump had indicated he could not guarantee the safety of the Iranian national team, prompting Tehran's reluctance to travel.

"We are currently negotiating with FIFA to hold Iran's matches in Mexico," Taj said.

Iran, placed in Group G, is scheduled to play in Los Angeles and Seattle against Belgium, New Zealand and Egypt. However, its participation on US soil remains uncertain.

On 12 March, Trump welcomed Iran's participation but warned it may not be safe. Writing on Truth Social, he said it was "not appropriate" for the team to be in the US "for their own life and safety".

His remarks followed a statement by Iranian Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali, who said Iran could not take part after accusing the US of killing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, according to reports.

—ANI

IRANIAN PLAYERS TRAIN IN BRISBANE AFTER ASYLUM GRANT

Two Iranian women footballers, Fatemeh Pasandideh and Atefeh Ramezanisadeh, have been pictured training with Brisbane Roar in their first public appearance since being granted asylum in Australia.

The duo joined the A-League Women's side in Brisbane, with the club pledging support as they "navigate the next stages". Both players thanked the club publicly, while officials confirmed they are in a secure location receiving government assistance.

Their appearance comes as the rest of Iran's squad travelled from Malaysia to Oman, ending a turbulent episode after Australia offered humanitarian visas following their Asian Cup exit. Seven players initially accepted asylum before five

reversed their decision and rejoined the team.

The squad had drawn global attention after some players remained silent during the national anthem, seen by some as protest. Concerns over their safety grew amid the ongoing conflict, with critics in Iran labelling them "traitors". Iran officials said players would be safe on their return. —PTI

Kiwis thrash South Africa to level T20 series

HAMILTON, 17 MARCH

Devon Conway struck a fluent 60 as New Zealand defeated South Africa by 68 runs in the second Twenty20 to level the five-match series 1-1 on Tuesday.

Asked to bat, New Zealand posted 175-6 on a pitch that became increasingly difficult. Conway anchored the innings, while Tom Latham helped them to 43-0 in the powerplay and 81-2 at the halfway mark.

However, scoring slowed on a two-paced surface. Nick Kelly made 21 before being bowled by Wiaan Mulder, while Mitchell Santner scored 20. Conway fell after holding the innings together, top-edging a pull to the wicketkeeper.

A late surge came from Josh Clarkson, who blasted 26 off nine balls, with Cole McConchie as the hosts plundered 24 runs off the final over bowled by captain Keshav Maharaj.

New Zealand posted 175-6 on a pitch that became increasingly difficult. Conway anchored the innings —X/ICC

South Africa's chase never took off as they were bowled out for 107 in 15.3 overs, with all wickets falling to catches. The visitors lost their last six wickets for 40 runs, with George Linde providing the only resistance, smashing 33 off 12 balls.

- Visitors lost their last 6 wickets for 40 runs, with George Linde providing resistance, smashing 33 off 12 balls. Pacers Ben Sears (3-14) and Lockie Ferguson (3-16) shared six wickets

Pacers Ben Sears (3-14) and Lockie Ferguson (3-16) shared six wickets, with Ferguson dismissing Linde to end the innings.

Maharaj admitted his side misread conditions, expecting dew to ease batting.

Conway, returning after limited opportunities in recent months, said it was pleasing to contribute.The third match will be played in Auckland on Friday. —PTI

Neymar left out of FIFA World Cup warm-up squad

RIO DE JANEIRO, 17 MARCH

Brazilian football superstar Neymar has been left out of Brazil's squad for the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 warm-up matches on Monday.

Brazil is set to play France on 26 March in Boston and Croatia on March 31 in Orlando ahead of the tournament in the United States, Mexico and Canada, according to Reuters. The decision to leave out Neymar comes after the 34-year-old missed a recent clash for Santos FC due to muscle fatigue, a match which Ancelotti had planned to assess him in person during a scouting trip ahead of the squad announcement.

Neymar, at a Kings League event in Sao Paulo on Monday, said that he was disappointed and sad about being left out. "But I remain focused, day after day, training session after training session, match after match. We will achieve our goal. The dream continues."

- Decision to leave out Neymar comes after the 34-year-old missed a recent clash for Santos FC due to muscle fatigue, a match which Ancelotti had planned to assess him in person

Brazil squad:

Goalkeepers: Alisson (Liverpool), Bento (Al-Nassr), and Ederson (Fenerbahce).

Defenders: Wesley (AS Roma), Alex Sandro (Flamengo), Douglas Santos (Zenit St Petersburg), Marquinhos (Paris St Germain), Gabriel Magalhaes (Arsenal), Bremer (Juventus), Danilo (Flamengo), Ibanez (Al-Ahli), and Leo Pereira (Flamengo).

Midfielders: Andrey Santos (Chelsea), Casemiro (Manchester United), Danilo (Botafogo), Fabinho (Al-Ittihad), Gabriel Sara (Galatasaray).

Forwards: Endrick (Olympique Lyonnais), Igor Thiago (Brentford), Luiz Henrique (Zenit St Petersburg), Rayan (Bournemouth), Joao Pedro (Chelsea), Gabriel Martinelli (Arsenal), Matheus Cunha (Manchester United), Raphinha (Barcelona), Vinicius Jr (Real Madrid).

—ANI

ANALYSTS SPEAK

Olympic football kicks off 4 days early

LOS ANGELES, 17 MARCH

Football competitions at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics will begin four days before the opening ceremony, with matches staged across seven cities in the United States.

Approved by the International Olympic Committee, the early 10 July start gives teams two additional rest days compared to previous editions. The schedule also builds in extra recovery time after the group stage and quarter-finals to ease travel demands.

Group-stage and quarter-final matches will be held in New York, Columbus (Ohio), Nashville (Tennessee) and St. Louis. New York and Columbus will each host nine matches across July 10–11, 13–14 and 16–17, along with a men's quarter-final on 20 July. Nashville will also stage nine matches, including both men's and women's quarter-finals on 20–21 July, while St Louis will host eight matches and a men's quarter-final.

- The knockout rounds will shift to California, with San Jose, San Diego and Pasadena hosting the latter stages. San Jose will stage seven matches, including women's group fixtures

The knockout rounds will shift to California, with San Jose, San Diego and Pasadena hosting the latter stages. San Jose will stage seven matches, including women's group fixtures and a quarter-final.

San Diego will host 11 matches, including group games, a women's quarter-final, both semi-finals on 24–25 July and the bronze-medal matches on 27–28 July.

The tournament will conclude at Pasadena's Rose Bowl, which will host five matches, including a women's quarter-final, both semi-finals and the men's and women's gold-medal matches on 28–29 July.

The full match schedule will be released later this year. —PTI